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LEONORA D'ORCO.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is a mountain pass, not far from the shores of the Lago Maggiore, which has been famous of late years for anything but fêtes and festivals. There, many an unfortunate traveller has been relieved of the burden of worldly wealth, and sometimes of all earthly cares; and there, many a postillion has quietly received, behind an oak-tree or a chesnut, a due share of the day's earnings from a body of those Italian gentlemen whose life is generally spent in working upon the highways, either with a long gun in their hands or a chain round their middles.

But, dear reader, the times I speak of were

centuries ago—those named “the good old times,” though Heaven only knows why they were called “good.”

The world was in a very strange state just then. The resurrection of art—the recovery of letters—the new birth of science, marked out the age as one of extraordinary development; but the state of society from which all these bright things sprang—flowers rising from a dunghill—was one of foul and filthy fermentation, where every wickedness that the corrupt heart of man can devise worked and travailed for the birth of better things. That pass, in those “good old times,” saw every day as much high-handed wrong and ruthless bloodshed as any pass in all Italy at the present time.

But such was not destined to be the case upon the present occasion, though the times of which I write were the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Guilt, and fraud, and even murder, often in those days covered themselves with golden embroidery and perfumed flowers; and, interposed between acts of

violence, rapine, and destruction, were brilliant festivals, the luxurious banquet, and the merry dance.

Wickedness, like virtue, proposes to itself enjoyment for its object; and the Bible is right when, as it often does, it uses the word wisdom as synonymous with virtue, for in the wisdom of the means is the certainty of the attainment. But the men of those days, as if they felt—how could they avoid feeling?—the insecurity of the ground on which they based their endeavours for the acquisition of happiness, were content to take the distant and doubtful payment by instalments of fruition, and let the revel, the pageant, the debauch go to the great reckoning as so much gained, without thinking of the terrible *per contra*.

That pass was well fitted to afford a scene for many of the dealings of those or these days. There the robber might lurk perfectly concealed in the dark nooks and crannies of the rocks, to spring forth upon the unwary traveller when least prepared—there a handful of men might

defend the passage against an army—there, the gay, happy party might raise the wild echo of the mountains to their joyous songs—and there the artist might linger for long hours, studying the fantastic shapes into which the ground has been thrown, and filling up the shadowy recesses with forms such as Rosa loved to draw.

For somewhat less than two miles, the road, which, even in those days, was a good and well-constructed highway, passed between two ranges of rocks. On one side—the left hand, going north—a stream ran by the side of the path, some twenty feet below its level; but the bank itself could be easily descended to the river, and the stream, though deep in some places, was easily to be crossed at others, where it spread out over fullen rocks and stones. But what was the use of crossing it? On the other side was no path, and nothing but tall, ragged cliffs, in some places upright and flat as if they had been cut with a knife, in others assuming the most wild and fantastic forms. Here was a strange grinning face, of gigantic size, starting forth in

stone from the surface of the cliff; there a whole statue standing out from the rocky mass, as if a sentinel guarding the pass; then would come a castle with towers and keep, ballium and barbican and all, and yet nought but mere rock, wrought by no hands but those of time, earthquake, and tempest. But every here and there, from pinnacle and point, or out of dell and cavern, would spring a dark pine or light green ash; and the sight of even vegetable life would harmonise the scene with human thoughts.

The average width of the bottom of the valley, including river and road, might be a hundred yards; but there was one place, nearly at the middle of the gorge—probably where, in ages far remote, before history or even tradition began, the stream, rushing new-born from the mountains, had paused in its course to gather strength ere it forced its way through the rocky barrier opposed to it—in which a little amphitheatre appeared, the mountains receding on either hand to let the river make a circuit round a low knoll and its adjacent meadow, some three

hundred yards across. A clump of trees had gathered together on the top of the little hillock, the turf was short and smooth; the stream, though still rapid, and fretting at the fallen stones in its way, had less of the torrent-like turbulence which it displayed where the pass was narrower; now and then, too, it would lapse into a quiet, deep, unruffled pool, where the many-colored rocks and pebbles at the bottom could be seen, glazed and brightened by its crystal waters; and the white clouds, floating over the deep blue Italian sky, would seem to pause, with curious pleasure, in their flight, to look down for a moment, on that fair spot, amid so much stony ruggedness.

Through this wild gorge, toward noon of a soft but breezy spring day in the year of grace 1494, coming from the northwest, rode a gay, a numerous, and brilliant a party; too few, indeed, to constitute an army, but too many and too well armed to fear the attack of any party of banditti less in number than those great mercenary bands whose leisure in those days was seldom long

enough to rob on their own account, so great was the demand for their services, in the same way, among the princes of the land. And yet the cavalcade of which I speak did not altogether assume a military aspect. It is true that the rear was brought up by a body of a couple of hundred lances, and that between these and those who rode foremost were a number of gentlemen, old and young, from beneath whose surcoats glanced corslet and cuissard, and who, though they rode with velvet cap on head and sometimes a hawk upon the wrist, had helmet, and lance, and shield near at hand, borne by gay and splendidly-dressed pages. But the most remarkable group had no warlike signs about it. All men but ecclesiastics and serfs, in those days, bore some kind of arms during their most peaceful avocations; and thus there were swords and daggers enough among the little party; but there were men in the robes of the Church—bishops, and archdeacons, and even a monk or two, while those of secular habit looked more like the carpet-treading, soft-lying children of a

court than warriors born for strife and conquest.

Thrown a little in advance of the mass rode two men at arms, heavily harnessed, and behind them, at perhaps twenty paces distance, five or six others, lance in hand. Then, however, came the principal group, at the head of which, with a crimson velvet bonnet or round cap on his head, ornamented with a single large ruby clasp—ing a long, thin feather, appeared, as it seemed, a mere youth. He was short in stature, and somewhat, though not remarkably, deformed; at least, the fall of his wide and fur trimmed mantle concealed in a great degree the defect of symmetry in his figure. All, indeed, had been done that the tailor's courtly art could do to conceal it, and the eye was more inclined to rest upon the countenance than upon the form. The face was not very handsome, but there was a frank, bold expression about it which won upon the regard at first sight; and yet a certain look of suffering—the trace, as it seemed, of a struggle between a high courage and bodily infirmity—

saddened his aspect. A mere passing stranger would have fixed the age of that young horseman probably at eighteen or nineteen; but he had seen, in reality, between twenty-two and twenty-three years; and although many vicissitudes had not attended his course, enough experience of the world, and courts, and men, had been his to have made him older in appearance and older in mind than he was.

Grouped half a step behind this figure, and stretching quite across the road—for no one would yield a place which he could fairly claim near the fountain of all honour and the source of advancement—were a number of cavaliers, of all sorts of callings, distinguished in general by some peculiarity of costume. At least, any eye accustomed to the dress of that day could distinguish among them the hard old warrior, the bishop, the high officer of the law, and gay and gallant courtiers not a few, among whom, holding their rank immediately behind the principal personage, were six pages, habited in what was called purple cloth of gold, mounted on light but beautiful

horses, bedizened with silken housings, and knots of ribbons, and flaunting feathers.

Among these last was no rivalry for place, for each had his particular station assigned to him; but with the rest an occasional angry word, and a more frequent angry look, would mark the indignation of some aspiring courtier at what he thought an attempt upon the part of another to get before him.

"My Lord of Tremouille," said one sharply, "I wish you would refrain your horse; I have hardly space to ride."

"He will not be refrained, my reverend lord," replied the other, "'tis an ambitious beast, well nigh as aspiring as a churchman. He will forward, whatever be in his way. Good sooth, he knows his place well too, and thinks that, though he might make a poor show in a king's closet, he may be found better near his sovereign in the march or the battle than any of the mules of the Church."

The words were spoken in no very low tone, and probably they reached the ears of the young

man at the head of the cavalcade; but he took no notice, though the prelate turned somewhat red, and several who were near laughed low; and a moment or two after, the whole party emerged from the narrower part of the gorge into that little amphitheatre which I have lately described.

"Why, what is here?" cried the leader of the band, reining up his horse. "This is a scene of fairy land! Who expected to meet with such a spectacle in this desert?"

"Why, Sire," replied the prelate, "you may remember his Excellency, the Regent of Milan, promised to meet you somewhere near this spot—at least before you reached the city."

"Ay, Louis the Moor knows where to lay chaff for young birds," muttered La Tremouille; "commend me to these Italians for wheedling and trickery."

"Hush, hush!" said one of his companions; "you cannot deny, Tremouille, that this Ludovic is a stout and skilful soldier, as well as a shrewd politician. I know not how he gained the name of 'The Moor,' but—"

"Why, they gave him the name because all his relations die black, or turn black after they die," answered the gallant soldier, with a bitter laugh; "but, on my life, the pageant is pretty. 'Tis a gallantry not expected in this wild place. Only, my good friend, look to what wine you drink at Ludovic's expense; it sometimes has a strange taste, and stranger consequences, men say, especially upon his enemies."

"I am no enemy," answered the other; "you, look to yourself, Tremouille. You must either dare the boccone or die of thirst."

"Nay, he will find out that I am one of his best friends," answered La Tremouille; "for I would fain have dissuaded the king from this wild expedition; and Master Ludovic, who urged it so strongly, will find, before he has done, that, ask a Frenchman to dinner, and he'll stay to supper also."

The scene which had excited so much surprise, and even admiration among the French, derived its principal interest from the ruggedness of the objects around. Some twenty or thirty small

tents had been pitched in the little meadow, round which the river circled, each with its pennon fluttering from the top of the gilt pole which supported it, while the group of trees upon the little monticule in the midst was so interlaced, at some eight feet from the ground, with ribbons and festoons of flowers, that it afforded as complete a shade from the sun as any of the pavilions. The trunks of the trees, too, were bound round with garlands, and although neither Tasso nor Guarini had yet fully revived the taste for the pastoral amongst the Italian people, the groups which were seen, both in the tents and under the branches, were all habited as shepherds and shepherdesses, according to the most approved notions of Golden Age costume in those days.

In each of the pavilions, the canvas door of which was thrown wide open, was spread a table apparently well supplied, and beneath the trees appeared a kingly board covered with fine linen and rich plate, while a buffet behind groaned beneath a mass of gold and silver. But the sharp eye of La Tremouille soon espied that the two

shepherds who stood at either end of the buffet, as well as two more behind it, were especially well armed for a pastoral race; and he did not fail to comment with a laugh upon the anomaly.

"Pooh! pooh!" cried the young King Charles VIII., turning his head over his shoulder to the stout soldier, but smiling at his remarks, "why should not shepherds have arms? They must defend their muttons, especially when such wolves as you are about."

La Tremouille answered with a proverb of very ancient date, "Well, sire, they cannot say I am a wolf in sheep's clothing. God send your majesty may not find some in this country, where they are plenty, I am told. Will you not dismount, sire, to do honor to this festa?"

"But where are our hosts?" asked Charles, looking round. "My Lord Archbishop, can you distinguish among the shepherds, Prince Ludovic or his fair lady? You have had advantage of us all in seeing their Highnesses."

"On my hopes, sire, I cannot tell which they are, if they be here," replied the prelate. "Here,

pretty maiden, will you let us know who is the lord of this feast, and who are to be the guests?"

The last words were spoken in Italian to a very handsome dark-eyed shepherdess, who, with a coquettish air, had passed somewhat near the royal party. But the girl merely replied by the word "Hark!" bending her head on one side and affecting to listen attentively. A moment after, the flourish of some trumpets was heard from the continuation of the pass on the other side of the meadow; and La Tremouille, turning round, gave some orders in a low tone to one of his attendants. By him they were carried to the rear, and immediately the party of lances which formed the king's escort put itself in motion, and spread out round one side of the meadow in the form of a crescent, leaving the monarch and his immediate attendants grouped on horseback in the midst.

If this was a movement of precaution against any party approaching from the other side, it was unnecessary. A moment after, on the op-

posite side of the meadow, issuing from the gorge like a stream of gold, appeared a cavalcade which the chroniclers of the day have delighted to describe as the height of splendor and magnificence. At its head appeared Ludovico Sforza, nicknamed "the Moor," accompanied by the Princess of Ferrara, his young wife, and followed by the whole court of Milan, each vying with the other in luxury and display. "The princess," says an Italian writer of the day, "was mounted on a superb horse, covered with cloth of gold and crimson velvet. She wore a dress of green cloth of gold, floating over which was a light gauze. Her hair, only bound by a ribbon, fell gracefully upon her shoulders and upon her bosom. On her head she bore a hat of crimson silk, surmounted by five or six feathers of red and grey. Her suite comprised twenty-two ladies of the first rank, all dressed like herself, and six cars followed, covered with cloth of gold, and filled with the rarest beauties of Italy."

It would be tedious as well as difficult to give any description of the scene that followed. The

two parties soon mingled together. Ceremony and parade were forgotten in gallantry and enjoyment. The younger men at once gave themselves up to the pleasures of the hour, and even the older and more sedate warriors and counselors soon shook off their frosty reserve under the warming influence of beauty and wine; and thus began the expedition of Charles VIII. to Naples, more like some festal pilgrimage than the hostile invasion of a neighbour's dominions. Thus it began, and thus it proceeded till the end was obtained, and then the scene changed to hard blows instead of feasts and pageants, and care and anxiety instead of revelry and enjoyment.

I have said it would be tedious to describe what followed; but there were episodes in the little drama acted in that wild amphitheatre which connect themselves with my story, and must be told.

CHAPTER II.

GENERAL conversation between the two courts of France and Milan was somewhat difficult; for, to say sooth, there were many there who could not speak the language of their neighbours, or spoke it very imperfectly. But Frenchmen, and Italians likewise, are famous for delivering themselves from such difficulties. They talk with a happy carelessness of whether they are understood or not, and eke out the defect of language with a sign or gesture. But there were some, there present, to whom both tongues were familiar; and while the King of France sat beneath the trees with Ludovico Sforza and his lovely wife, one of the youths who had followed

him might be seen at the other side of the little grove, stretched easily on the ground between two young girls who had accompanied the princess, and with one of whom, at least, his acquaintance seemed of early date.

The young man was tall, well formed, and handsome; and he looked older than he really was, for he had not yet seen more than eighteen summers. The two girls were younger still, neither having reached the age of fifteen years. Both gave promise of exceeding beauty—otherwise perhaps they would have been excluded from the gay train of the princess; but, though womanhood ripens earlier under Italian skies than in colder climates, they were still evidently in girlhood, and, what was more rare, they had apparently preserved all the freshness and innocent frankness of their age.

One called the young man "Cousin Lorenzo," and teased him gaily with criticisms of his dress and appearance; vowed he had promised to bring back a beard from France, and yet he had not even a moustache; declared that she abominated

the hair cut short before and hanging down behind after the French mode, and assumed that the large sleeves of his surcoat must be made to carry provisions in, not only for himself, but for all his company. She was the younger of the two, and probably not yet fourteen years of age; and though there was a world of merriment in her sparkling blue eyes, and a gay, bright smile kept playing lightly round her lips, yet it would have been a hard critic who could, in her, have discovered any of that coquetry from which even her age is not exempt. On the contrary, she seemed to strive to direct her cousin's admiration to her fair companion, who, in her eyes, was the most beautiful and perfect creature in the universe; and, in truth, there was many a one in after days who thought so to his cost.

Very different in personal appearance was she from her younger companion: tall for her age, and of that light, slender form which, in early youth, often promises the rich, flowing contour, at an after period, which Guido loved, and even

Raphael and Julio Romano did not undervalue. She was dark in complexion too—that is to say, her hair was black as a raven's wing; and her full, almond-shaped eyes, with the lashes that shaded them, and the arched eyebrows above were dark as the hair. But yet there was something that softened all. Either it was the flowing of the lines into each other, or the happy blending of the tints, but nothing in the face or form was sharp or too defined. The skin was clear, and soft, and bright—so far dark, indeed, as to harmonise with the hair and eyes; but through the slight olive tint of southern climes shone the clear, warm rose of health; and, over all, youth and dawning womanhood shed their thousand inexpressible graces, like the winged loves which, in one of Albano's pictures, flutter round the Goddess of Beauty. She was gay, too—gay even as her bright-eyed companion at times; but it was with sudden fits and starts; and every now and then would intervene lapses of thought, as if she were questioning with herself of things beyond her knowledge. It is not rare to find that

a thoughtful youth ripens into a passionate maturity. Her dress was one common at that day, we find, in the court of Ferrara; but it had not long been the mode in any part of Italy; and to the eyes of the young Lorenzo, who had been nearly two years absent from his native country, it seemed strange and hardly decent. It consisted of a robe somewhat like that of the princess, except that the ground of the cloth of gold, instead of green, was of a pale delicate rose color. The sleeves, in the young girl's case, fitted tight to the rounded arms, but the front of each, from the shoulder nearly to the wrist, was cut open, showing the chemise of snowy lawn, except where, every two or three inches, a small jewel, in the form of a button, gathered the edges of the cloth of gold together. The robe in front also was thrown back from the neck and bosom, which was only shaded by the profuse curls of jetty hair. Instead of the small hat, with its plume of feathers, worn by the wife of the regent, a veil of rich black lace, fastened at the back of the head with a jewelled pin, thence

to the shoulders; and round her waist was a knotted cord of gold, the tassels of which, strangely twisted and contorted, fell almost to her feet.

Such was the appearance of Leonora d'Orco at the age of fourteen, or very little more. Of that which is beyond appearance I may have occasion to speak hereafter.

Facts may seem trite, which nevertheless must be said in explanation of the character he depicts by any one who writes the history of another. We lose the key of a cabinet, nearly new, perhaps, and we send to a vender of old iron to see if we cannot find one to fit it. We select one and then another for trial, and find at length a key which seems to conform to the shape of the key-hole. Would any one object to its trial because it is old and rust-worn? Well, it is old; it may have served in a hundred locks before, for aught we know; but it fits, and opens, and shuts this lock, and that is all we have to do with it.

It has often been said, and was frequently insisted upon by Goëthe, that each human being is

a different being at each period of his age from that which he was at an anterior period. The very substance of the body, say the physiologists, is entirely changed in every seven years. What of the mind? Do cares, and sorrows, and experience, and joys, and hopes, and fruitions, effect no change in it? God forbid! If we believe the mind immortal, and not subject, like the body, to death and resurrection, still greater must be the changes; for its state must be progressive towards evil or towards good. Expansion certainly comes with knowledge; every day has its lesson, its reproof, its encouragement; and the very development or decay of the mortal frame affects the tenant within—hardens, strengthens, elevates, instructs; or, entenders, enfeebles, depresses, depraves. Suffice it here to say, that perhaps no one ever in life experienced greater changes of thought, feeling, character, than Leonora d'Orco, as the winged moments flew over her head. And yet the indestructible essence was the same; every essential element remained; it was but the combinations that were

modified. A few years later, had you asked her if she had ever felt such sensations, or thought such thoughts as she felt and thought now, she would instantly have said "No;" but one moment's lifting of the veil which hides the pictures of the past would have shown her that she had felt, had thought such things; one moment's scrutiny of her own heart would have shown her that, in another form, she felt them, thought them still.

But let us regard her only in the present. See how her eye sparkles, how her lip wreaths itself in smiles, and how the joyous laugh breaks forth clear, and sweet, and musical, finding expression not only in its own melodious tones, but in every feature—aye, and even in the colour that rises in a gay bashfulness, and spreads suddenly over cheek and brow, as if a ray of morning sunshine had found its way through the green branches and lighted up her face. And then all is still again—still, and quiet, and thoughtful—and her eyes bend down—and the long lashes kiss her cheek—and the rose has faded away—and the

clear skin is paler than before, till something from one or the other of her gay companions awakens merriment again, and then she changes once more with the sudden change of mountain skies.

But see! they are talking of more serious matters now.

"Not enter Milan!" cries Leonora: "not enter beautiful Milan! Signor Lorenzo, how is that? Have you lost all love and pride in your own fair country?"

"I must not enter Milan," he answered with a sigh; "but if I might, Leonora, I could not."

"But why—why?" she asked eagerly; "are you one of the exiles? Oh, if that is so, the princess loves me well, and besides, when you come with the King of France, a guest of Count Ludovic, the past must be forgotten in the present, and you be welcomed too. Oh, do not say you will not come."

She spoke eagerly, and then cast down her eyes, for his met hers with a look too full of admiration to be mistaken.

"Do not ask him—do not ask him," said sweet Bianca Maria di Rovera; "he is going to my grandfather's villa till the king marches on. That is already settled, Leonora."

"And you never told me, when your grandfather engaged us to go there too," said Leonora; "but how will the King of France be pleased?"

"He has given permission," answered Lorenzo; "he understands well that the son of Carlo Visconti could only enter Milan in one manner."

The young girl bent her head, and only answered, in a low tone, "I would fain hear more. It seems to me a strange arrangement."

"You shall hear all, at some other time and place, Signora Leonora," replied Lorenzo: "every minute I expect the trumpets to sound to horse; and my tale, which is a sad one, should have some quiet spot for the telling, and evening skies, and few listeners near."

The listeners, indeed, were, or might be, too many in a place where all was suspicion and

much was danger. Every instant some one was passing near them—either one of the pastoral gentry who had waited for the meeting of the two courts, or some one from the suites of the two princes.

The latter part of the lad's reply seemed at once to awaken Leonora to the necessity of caution. Her younger companion, indeed, who seemed ignorant of her cousin's early history, pressed him with girlish eagerness to tell all then and there; but the other, who even then knew more of Italian life—not without an effort, yet with much delicacy of judgment and feeling—directed their conversation into other channels, and soon brought back the gaiety and the sparkle which at that time was cultivated almost as an art by the higher classes of Italy. Speedily thought, and sentiment, and mood followed the course of even such light things as words: serious topics and dark remembrances, and even present dangers and discomforts, were forgotten;—and, as if in order to give relief to the lights in the future of life some dark shades were needed—the

young three there gathered appeared to find in the faint allusion made to more painful things an accession of gaiety and enjoyment. The strangeness of first acquaintance was cast away between the two who had never met before. Bianca Maria, or Blanche Marie, as the French would have termed her, forgot how long a time had passed since she had seen her cousin, and all for the time was once more joy and ligh-hearted merriment. The same spirit *seemed* to pervade the whole party there assembled. It is hard to say *seemed*, for any eye that gazed upon that scene would have boldly concluded that all was peace and joy.

Oh, false word! Oh, false seeming! There was doubt, and fear, and malevolence, and treachery there in many a heart; and of all the groups into which those two gay courts had separated themselves, perhaps reality, and enjoyment, and careless mirth were more truly to be found among those three young people, who, forgetful of courtly ceremony, had taken their seats beneath the trees on the west of the knoll, with their

backs turned toward the royal and princely personages present. They, at least, knew how to enjoy the hour; and there let us leave them, with the benediction and applause of Lorenzo the Magnificent upon them:

“Quant'è bellagiovinenza
Che si fugge tuttavia
Chi vuol esser lietto, sia
Di doman non c'è certezza.”

CHAPTER III

IF the world be a stage, as the greatest of earth's poets has said, and all the men and women in it merely players, human life divides itself not only into acts, but scenes. The drop curtain falls for a longer or a shorter period; and, without whistle or call, the place is shifted, and the interval is filled up with nought which affects the actors before the public, or the general course of their own parts, or the end of the great drama played. Let us pass over the mere shiftings of the scene: the pompous reception of Charles the VIII. in Milan; the time he wasted there in youthful merriment and courtly gallantry; the intrigues ending in nothing, which went on during his stay in the Lombard capital; all the French

gaieté de cœur with which the dashing and daring warriors of the most charming land in the world cut a throat, or make love, or stake a fortune on a card—let us pass them all by, with the exception of one slight incident, which had some influence upon the fate of one of our principal characters.

It is very customary—indeed, it is always customary with men of impulse, especially when the impulses are impetuous and ill-regulated—for persons possessing great power to be awed, as it were, for a short time by the terrible responsibilities of their position—to seek uninterrupted thought, with an endeavour in their own mind to find support under the weight from their own intellect, or, frustrated in that dependence upon so frail a reed, to apply to a higher guide, who can give not only direction but strength—not only counsel but capability. There is many an occasion in which the most self-relying and resolute feels the need of an intelligence higher than his own, and a force beyond the force of his own character.

In many respects the character of Charles VIII. was to be admired. His expedition to Italy was rash, ill-conceived, and ill-executed; but the conception was great, the objects when rightly viewed, noble, and the result, though not fortunate, such as showed in the young king the higher qualities of fortitude, resolution, and that courage which crushes obstacles by boldly confronting them. But many a time Charles doubted of his own course—only, indeed, in times of success and seeming prosperity—and asking himself whether that course was right, was prudent, was wise, sought guidance and instruction from on high.

On these occasions he avoided all companionship, and asked direction from the throne of wisdom in solitary prayer. It was thus he came forth in the early morning to the church of St. Stephen, attended only by a single page, and habited plainly enough to attract no attention. He had entered the chapel of St. Ambrose, the patron saint of the city, and was in the very act of kneeling, when the voices of two other

men, speaking somewhat loud in the general stillness, attracted his attention.

"Ah!" said the one, "it was there he slew him, and had there been men to second him, Lombardy would have now been free."

"It goes about the city," said the other, "that young Lorenzo, his son, is close at the gates of Milan, ready to avenge his father's death upon the Sforzeschi."

"He had better look to his own safety," replied the first speaker, "for he has to do with powerful enemies, and what the strong hand and the sword cannot accomplish, the dagger or the cup can perchance perform."

The king listened, but nothing more of interest met his ear, and when his prayer was finished he returned to his private cabinet, and wrote a few words in haste, without consulting even his most approved counsellors. It was done; and then he rang a little hand-bell on the table. It was not like a modern bell, being four sided, but it had a good, loud sound, and it immediately brought an attendant from the ante-room.

"Call hither the Baron de Vitry," said the king. He spoke of that De Vitry who was the ancestor of the well-known Marechal de Vitry, and who, a few days after, became Marquis de Vitry on the death of his father. "Tell him to be quick, for he sleeps late when there is no fighting to be done."

The man hastened away to execute his commands, but it was some twenty minutes before the officer summoned appeared, and then, to say sooth, he was but imperfectly apparelled. There was a point here and there untrussed, and his collar was certainly not placed in its usual and intended position—indeed, some severe critics of costume might have supposed that it was turned wrong side before.

"Always behind, De Vitry," said the monarch, who had grown impatient in waiting.

"I was not behind at St. Aubin, sire," replied the young officer with a gay confidence; "but sire, we were bound to sit up so late last night for the honour of France that our eyes had leaden weights upon them this morning."

"Ay, a revel, of course," said the king—"too much revelling, De Vitry. We must think of more serious things."

"Good faith! sire, we are all ready," replied the young officer; "we only revel because we have nought else to do. While your majesty and your wise counsellors are gravely deliberating in the cabinet, we have nought else to do but dance, and drink, and sing in the hall; and I am sure you, sire, would not have us behind the Italian in dancing and drinking, when they go so far before as in singing; but only give us something else to do, and we are ready to ride, or fight, or work in any way to-morrow."

The young king mused for a moment, and then murmured the words, "A just reproof!" Then taking the paper he had written, he added, "Take a hundred men of your company of ordnance, De Vitry, and set out at once toward Vigevano. Five miles on this side of the town, on the bank of the Ticino, you will find a villa belonging to the Count of Rovera. There you will find young Lorenzo Visconti. Give him that

paper, appointing him to the command of the troop of poor young Moustier, who was stabbed, no one knows why or how."

"Oh, sire, I know why, and how too," answered De Vitry, in his usual gay, light-hearted tone; "he was stabbed because he chose to make love to the daughter of the confectioner who lives just below the castle—she is, indeed, a wonderful little beauty; but she is betrothed to a young armourer and Moustier was not right to seek her for his leman, under her promised husband's very nose. There are plenty of free-hearted dames in Milan, without his breaking up the happiness of two young people who never sought him. Then, as to the way, sire, that is very easily explained—a dark corner, a strong hand, and a sharp dagger over the left shoulder, and the thing was soon accomplished. Ludovic says he will have the young armourer broken on the wheel, to satisfy your majesty; but I trust you will tell him not; for, in the first place, nothing can be proved against him; and, in the next, according to his own notions, he did nothing but what was right;

and, in the next, De Moustier was all in the wrong; and, in the next, this youth, Tomaso Bondi, is the best armourer in Italy—no man I ever saw can inlay a Milan corslet as he can.”

“All very cogent reasons,” answered the king, “and the regent shall do nought to him, to satisfy me. De Moustier forgot the warning I gave him after I was ill at Lyons, when he insulted the young wife of the dean of the weavers; and as he has sought his fate, so he must abide it. But, as I have said, seek out my young Cousin Lorenzo, give him the paper, and tell him to join you next day at Pavia or Vigevano; but do not let your men dismount, and take care that they commit no outrage on the lands of Signor Rovera. At Vigevano you may halt till you hear that I am on my way to Pavia. You shall have timely notice.”

The officer took the open paper from the king's hand, and in a nonchalant way gazed at the contents, exclaiming as he did so, “On my faith, it is fairly written!”

The cheek of Charles turned somewhat red, and, fixing his eye keenly upon De Vitry, he said,

"You mean no offence, young sir, I believe; but Baron de Vitry, I tell you, if two years ago your king could not write his name, it was not his fault. Would that all my nobility would try to retrieve their errors as I have striven to remedy the defects of my education."

The young monarch was evidently much pained at what he thought an allusion to the ignorance in which he had been brought up; and De Vitry whose thoughts were perfectly innocent of such offence, bent his knee and kissed his sovereign's hand, saying, in his frank way, "On my life, sire, I only admired the writing, and wished I were as good a clerk. Heaven knows that, though I can write fast enough, no man can read as fast what I have written. It has cost me many a time more than an hour to make out my own letters. This carrying a confounded lance, ever since I was eighteen, makes my finger unfit for handling a quill; and, unless I fall in love, and have to write sweet letters to fair ladies—which God forfend!—I dare say the time will come when I shall be unable to write at all."

The king smiled good-humoredly at his blunt officer, for Charles's anger soon passed away, and, bidding him rise, he said, "There, go, De Vitry; you are a rough specimen of our French soldiers, for these silken ladies of the South. I fear you will not make much way with them."

"Oh, they love me all the better, sire," answered De Vitry; "I'm a new dish at their table. But I go to perform your will, sire; and, good faith! I am not sorry to be in the saddle again. But what am I to do with that young fellow, Bayard, who struck the big Ferrara man for calling us barbarians? We have kept a close eye upon him, for he seems never to dream that, if the signor were to meet him alone, he would put a dagger in him, or break his back as a storm breaks a hard young sapling. Good faith, sire, the man would eat the boy up as the old giants used to do with the princes and princesses of I don't know where in days of yore."

"That is well bethought," replied the king. "I wish to have no brawling, De Vitry. Take Bayard with you to Pavia. Stay! let me con-

sider what I can do to smooth his removal from the court, for he is a brave lad, and will some time make a name in life. They are hardy soldiers, these men of the Isere."

"He is of such stuff as kings of France have most need of," answered De Vitry. "Give him ten years more, and I would match him against Mohammed. But the cornet of my troop, you know, sire, died on Friday last of wine poison at Beccafico's—we hold our life on slender tenure in this land—and if your majesty would please to name Bayard to fill his place, he would be very well content, for he loves Bellona's harness more than Cupid's, as my old tutor, the Abbé de Mortemar, used to say when he could not get me to construe Ovid. But I know not how Bayard may take Signor Lorenzo's appointment to De Moustier's troop, he being also one of your pages, and more than a year older."

"Lorenzo Visconti is our cousin, sir," replied Charles, somewhat sternly; "and, were he not so, we suffer no one to comment on our will in ordaining how we shall be served. If Pierre de

Terrail hesitates at the honor we confer on him so young, because we name our own kindred to a higher command at a younger age, let him remain as he is. We will not resent such conduct, but we will make him feel that we are King of France."

There was sufficient irritation in his tone to induce the young officer to withdraw; and he left the king's presence, repeating to himself, "Our cousin! I see not how that is; but we are all cousins in Adam, God wot; and the affinity must be somewhere thereabout, I take it. Well, God send me some royal cousins, or right noble ones, for 'tis the only road to promotion in this world."

CHAPTER IV.

It was early in the month of September. The grapes were already purple with the draughts of sunshine which they had drunk in through a long, ardent summer, and the trees had already begun to display "the sear and yellow leaf"—early, early, like those who exhaust in life's young day all the allotted pleasures of man's little space. The autumn had fallen upon them soon. Yet it was a lovely scene, as you gazed from one of those little monticules which stud the Lombard plains. There is something in the descent from the mountains into Italy which seems to anticipate the land—not so much in its physical as in its moral features; a softness,

a gentleness, a gracefulness which is all its own, while round about, unseen, but felt in every breeze, is the dark, pestilential swamp, gloomy and despairing, or else a brighter but more treacherous land, fair to the eye, but destructive to vitality, which lures but to destroy. One easily conceives the character of a large portion of the people of the Middle Ages in Italy from the aspect of the land. But it is of the people of the Middle Ages only. One can hardly derive any notion of the ancient Roman from the characteristics of the country till one plunges into the Campagna, where the stern, hard features of the scenery seem to represent that force which, alas! has passed away.

And yet it was a lovely scene, and a moment of sweet and calm enjoyment, as three young people sat together on the lower step of a terrace near Vigevano, with a fountain gushing and murmuring some twenty feet above, and a beautiful garden filled with mulberry trees and vines, and some oranges, not very luxuriant, but diffusing a pleasant but languid odour round. The

eye wandered over the shrubs and trees to the lands watered by the Ticino on its way to Pavia; and beyond, in the evening light, long lines of undulating country were marked out in the deep blue tints peculiar to the distant scenery of Italy. The terrace, below which the three were seated, was long and wide, and rising therefrom, near the centre, was one face of a villa, built in a style of which few specimens remain. The taste and genius of Palladio had not yet given to the villa-architecture of Lombardy that lightness and grace which formed the characteristic of a new style of art. There was something, at that time, in every country-house of Italy of the heavy, massive repulsiveness of the old castello. But yet the dawn of a better epoch was apparent, in the works of Andrea Palladio's great master, Trissino; and in the very villa of which I speak, though here and there a strong, tall tower was apparent, and the basement story contained stone enough to have built a score of modern houses; much ornament of a light and graceful character had been lavished upon the whole building, as

if to conceal that it was constructed for defence as well as enjoyment. Indeed, as is generally the case, there was a certain harmony between the times and state of society and the constructions of the period. The Italian smiled, and revelled, and feasted, and called in music, and song, and poetry, to cover over the dangers, and the griefs, and the terrors of every day; and the palace in the city, or the villa in the country, was often as richly decorated as if its massy inner walls were never intended to preserve the life and fortune of its owner from the hands of rude assailants, nor its halls ever to witness deeds of horror and cruelty within their dark recesses.

It was, indeed, an evening and a scene such as Lorenzo Visconti had described as fitted for the telling of his own history. All was still and quiet around; the leaves of the vines hardly moved with the light air, the glow of the western sky faded off into deep purple as the eye was raised from the horizon to the zenith; no moving object—no, not a floating cloud, could be seen on

any side; and the murmur of the fountain seemed to add to, rather than detract from, the stillness. The three young people—I need not tell the reader who they were—had ranged themselves as their nature or their temporary feelings prompted. On the lowest step Bianca Maria had placed herself, looking up with her sweet confiding eyes towards the young companion whom she almost idolized. On the step above was her cousin Lorenzo; and on a step above them both, but leaning with her elbow on her knee, and her cheek resting on her hand, a little to the right of Lorenzo and the left of Bianca, was Leonora d'Orco, with her dark eyes bent down, drinking in the words of the young soldier.

It was a group such as Bronzino might have delighted to paint; for not only were there those colors in it which all Italians love, and all Italian artists take pleasure in blending and harmonizing--the deep browns, which characterise the complexion of their country, with the rarer and exceptional fairness sometimes found among

them—the flowing flaxen hair of the North, and its rich crimsons, but in the dress of the three also there were those strong contrasts of harmonious hues, if I may use what may seem at first sight (but only at first sight) a contradiction in terms—the rich red, and the deep green, and the yellow touching upon brown, and the pale blue. How charming, how satisfactory was the art of those old painters in reproducing on the canvass the combinations which nature produces every day. And yet Art, following Nature in its infinite variety, has shown us, in the works of Murillo and some other Spanish artists, that perfect harmony of coloring can afford as much pleasure as harmonized contrasts, and that in painting also there may be Mozarts as well as Beethovens.

The evening light fell beautifully upon that young group, as they sat there on the steps of the terrace, and, just glancing round the angle of an old ruined building of Roman date in the gardens below, touched gently and sweetly upon the brow and eyes of Bianca Maria, lighted up

the face of Lorenzo, and shone full upon the whole figure of Leonora, as she gazed down upon the speaker.

“ I must go back far into the times past,” he said; “ I dare say you are well aware that the Viscontis once reigned as lords and dukes of Milan. Do not suppose, Leonora, that I am about to put forth any claim to that rich inheritance; for, though nearly allied to the ruling race, my branch of the family were already separated from the parent stem when the imperial bull was issued which conferred sovereignty on the branch that ended with Filippo Maria. That bull limited the succession strictly, and we had and have no claim. At the death of Filippo, the Milanese found still one spark of ancient spirit, and they declared themselves a republic. But republics have in them, unhappily, no seeds of durability. There is not strength and virtue enough in man to give them permanence. Rude nations may be strong and resolute enough to maintain such institutions in their youth; but art and luxury soften, and in softening en-

feeble, so that men learn to love ease more than independence, pleasure better than freedom. A new dynasty was destined soon to succeed the old. The Viscontis were noble, of high race and long descent, connected with every sovereign house of Europe. But the son of a peasant was to gather their inheritance and wear their coronet.

“ There was a man born at Cotignola, in Romagna, named Sforza Attendolo, of very humble birth, but prodigious strength of body and extraordinary military genius. Famine drove him to seek food in the trade of war. He joined one of the great companies, rose by the force of genius and courage, and in the end became one of the two most famous condottieri in Italy. After a career of almost unexampled glory and success, he was drowned in swimming the Pescara, but his son Francesco succeeded to his command, and to more than his inheritance of military fame. He was, indeed, a great man; and so powerful did he become, that Filippo Maria Visconti promised him—to the illegitimate son of a Romagnese pea-

sant—the hand of his only daughter to secure his services in his many wars. He hesitated long, it is true, to fulfil a promise which he felt to be degrading, but he was compelled to submit at length. With the aid of Francesco Sforza he was a great prince—without him he was nothing; and when he died, old and blind, he left his people to struggle against the man whom he had aided to raise, but upon whom his own fate had very often depended. Francesco was noble at heart, though ambitious. His enemies he often treated with unexampled generosity, forbearance, and even kindness. He showed that he feared no man, by freeing the most powerful and most skilful of his captive enemies; but he pursued his course steadily toward dominion, not altogether unstained by deceit and falsehood, but without cruelty or tyranny. Sore pressed by famine, and with his armies beneath their walls, the Milanese, who recognized his high qualities, though they feared his dominion, threw open their gates to him, and renounced their liberty at the feet of a new

duke in February, 1450. The Viscontis had nothing to complain of. The reigning branch was extinct; the rest were not named in the imperial bull, and they, with their fellow-citizens, submitted calmly to the rule of the greatest man then living in Italy. Nor had they cause to regret the act during the life of Francesco Sforza. He ruled the land justly and moderately, maintained his own renown to the last, and showed none of the jealousy of a tyrant towards those whose birth, or fortune, or talents might have made them formidable rivals. He was wise to conciliate affection in support of power. His good reign of sixteen years did more to enslave the Milanese people than the iron heel of any despot could have done; but there were not wanting those among his children to take cruel advantage of that which his virtues had accomplished. He died about thirty years ago, and to him succeeded his eldest son, the monster Galeazzo. From that hour the iron yoke pressed upon the neck of the Milanese. The new duke had less ambition than his father,

and inherited none of his talents; but he had a genius for cruelty, and an energy in crime unequalled even by Eccelino. Those whom he seemed most to favour and who least feared the tyrant's blow, were always those on whom it fell most heavily and most suddenly; and they furnished, when they little expected it, fresh victims for the torture, or for some new and unheard-of kind of death. His luxury and his licentiousness passed all bounds; no family was safe; no lady's honor was unassailed or uncalumniated; violence was resorted to when corruption did not succeed; in each day he comprised the crimes of a Tarquin and the ferocity of a Nero. There were, however, three noble hearts in Milan, and they fancied there were many more. They dreamed that some public spirit still lingered among their countrymen—at least enough, when delivered from actual fear of the tyrant, to seize the opportunity and regain their liberty. When there is no law, men must execute justice as they can; and those three resolved to put Galeazzo to death—a mild punishment for a life of crime.

Their names were Olgiati, Lampugnani, and Carlo Visconti. All had suffered from the tyrant. Olgiati's sister had fallen a victim to his violence. Lampugnani's wife was another. My mother only escaped by death. But it was not vengeance that moved the patriots. They had only suffered what others had suffered. The evils of the country had become intolerable; they were all the work of one man; and the three determined to deprive him of the power to inflict more. They looked upon their undertaking not only as a great and glorious enterprise, but as a religious duty, and they prepared themselves for its execution with prayer and fasting, and the most solemn sacrament of the Church. Many difficulties intervened. Either the consciousness that his tyranny and crimes had become intolerable, or one of those strange presentiments of coming fate which have affected many men as the hour of their destiny drew nigh, rendered Galeazzo less accessible, more suspicious and retired than before. He seldom came forth from his palace, was no longer seen on occasions of

public ceremony, or in fêtes and festivals. There was, indeed, one day when he could hardly fail to show himself, and that was on St. Stephen's day—a day when, by immemorial custom, every one honors the first martyr by attending mass at the great church. That day they fixed upon for the execution of their design, and each was early in the church, with a dagger hidden in the sleeve of his gown. The world has called it a sacrilege; but they looked upon it as a holy and a righteous deed, sanctified by the justice of the cause, that the most sacred place could not be polluted by it.

“In the mean time Galeazzo seemed to feel that the day and hour of retribution had arrived. He would fain have avoided it; he sought to have mass performed in the palace; he applied to a chaplain—to the Bishop of Como—but in all instances slight obstacles presented themselves, and in the end he determined to go to the Cathedral. One touch of human tenderness and feeling, the first for many a day, broke from him. He sent for his two children, took leave of them

tenderly, and embraced them again and again. He then went forth; but the conspirators awaited him in the church; and hardly had he entered when three daggers were plunged into his breast and back. Each struck a second blow; and the monster who had inflicted torture, and death, and disgrace upon so many innocent fellow-creatures sank to the pavement, exclaiming, 'Sancta Maria!'

"The three then rushed towards the street to call the people to arms; but Lampugnani stumbled, catching his feet in the long trains of the women who were already kneeling in the nave. As he fell he was killed by a Moor, one of Galeazzo's base retainers. My father was killed where he stood, and Olgiato escaped into the street only to find the people on whom he trusted either dead to all sense of patriotism and justice, or stupefied and surprised. Not a sword was drawn—not a hand was raised in answer to his cry, 'To arms!' and torture and the death of a criminal once more closed the career of a patriot.

"I was an infant at the time, but in the days of Galeazzo Sforza infants were not spared, and the nurse who had me in her arms hurried forth, carrying me with her, ere the gates of the city could be closed, or the followers of the duke came to search and pillage our house. She took refuge in a neighbouring village, whence we were not long after carried to Florence, where the noble Lorenzo de Medici, after whom I had been baptized, received me as his child, and when he felt death approaching, sent me to the court of France to finish my education among my relatives there."

"And was this Prince Ludovic the son of Galeazzo?" asked Leonora, as soon as he had paused.

"Oh no—his younger brother," replied Lorenzo. "He holds the son in durance, and the son's wife, on the pretence of guardianship, though both are of full age: but, if I be not mistaken, the day of their deliverance is near at hand, for I have heard the king say he will certainly see them, and learn whether they are not

fitted to rule their own duchy without the interference of so dangerous a relation."

"God grant the king may be in time," said Bianca Maria; "for it is said the young duke is very sick, and people say he has poison in all he eats."

"Hush! hush!" cried Leonora, anxiously. "Long confinement and wearing care are enough to make him sick, Bianca, without a grain of poison. No one can die now-a-days without people saying he is poisoned. 'Tis a sad tale, indeed, you tell, Lorenzo, and I have often heard our sweet Princess of Ferrara say that Galeazzo was a bad man; but Ludovic surely is not cruel. He has pardoned many a man, I have heard, who had been condemned by the tribunals."

A somewhat bitter smile came upon the lips of Lorenzo Visconti, but he merely replied, "The good and innocent always think others good and innocent till bitter experience teaches them the contrary."

Perhaps he might have added more, but the sound of footsteps on the terrace above caught

his ear, and he and Leonora at once turned to see who approached. The steps were slow and deliberate, and were not directed toward the spot where the young people sat; but they instantly checked further conversation on the subjects previously discussed, while from time to time each of the three gave a glance toward two gentlemen who had just appeared upon the terrace. The one was a man somewhat advanced in years, though not exactly what might be called an old man. His hair and beard were very gray, it is true, but his frame was not bent, and his step was still firm and stately. He was richly dressed, and wore a large, heavy sword, of a somewhat antique fashion. Lorenzo asked no questions concerning him, for he knew him already as the grandfather of his young cousin, Bianca Maria. The other was a younger man, dressed in black velvet, except where the arms were seen from under the long hanging sleeves of his upper garment, showing part of an under coat of cloth of silver. He was tall and thin, and his face would have deserved the name of

handsome had it not been that the eyes, which were fine in themselves, and overshadowed by strongly-marked eyebrows, were too close together, and had a slight obliquity inward. It was not what could be absolutely called a squint, but it gave a sinister expression to his countenance, which was not relieved by a habit of keeping his teeth and lips closely compressed, as if holding a rigid guard over what the tongue might be inclined to utter.

They took their way to the extreme end of the terrace, and then walked back till they came on a line with the spot where the three young people sat, still silent, for there is a freemasonry in youth that loves not to have even its most trifling secrets laid bare to other eyes, or its most innocent councils broken in upon.

There the two gentlemen paused, and the younger seemed to end some conversation which had been passing between them by saying, "I know not much, Signor Rovera, of the history or views of other times, or for what men lived

and strove for in those days; but I do know, and pretty well, the history of my own times, and the rules by which we have to guide ourselves in them. If we have not ourselves power, we must serve those who have power; and while we keep ourselves from what you would call an evil will on our own part, we must not be over nice in executing the will of those above us. Theirs is the deed, and theirs the responsibility. The race of Sforza is not, methinks, a higher or a better race than the race of Borgia. Both are peasants compared to you or me, but the Borgias are rising, and destined to rise high above us both; the Sforzas have risen, and are about to fall, or I mistake the signs of the times. Men may play with a kitten more safely than with a lion; and when Ludovico called this King of France into Italy, he put his head in the wild beast's mouth."

"Ah, that that were all!" exclaimed the old Count of Rovera. "I should little care to see that wild beast close his heavy jaws upon the

skull of his inviter, if that would satisfy him; but Italy—what is to become of Italy?”

“God knows,” answered the other drily. “She has taken so little care of her children, that, good faith! they must take care of themselves, and let her do the same, my noble cousin. We are both too old to lose much by her fall, and neither of us young enough to hope to see her rise. Phoenixes are rare in these days, Signor Count. There,” he continued, pointing to the little group upon the steps, “there are the only things that are likely to spring up, except corn, and mulberry-trees, and such vegetables. Why, how the girl has grown already! She is well-nigh a woman. She will need a husband soon, and then baby-clothes, and so forth. I must speak with her. Leonora! Leonora!”

At the sound of his voice, Leonora, who had been sitting with her head bent down and her eyes fixed upon the marble at her feet, sprang up like a startled deer, and ran up the steps toward him; but when within a step, she paused, and bent before him without speaking.

CHAPTER V.

"WHO is that man?" asked Lorenzo Visconti in a low tone, while Leonora stood before the stranger, silent, and, as it were, subdued.

"That is her father, Ramiro d'Orco," answered Bianca Maria; "he has just returned from Romagna, I suppose; he has not been here for a year, and I heard he was there."

"Her father!" exclaimed the youth; "and is it so a child meets a father? Oh God! had I a parent living who came back from a long absence, how I should spring to receive his first caress! how the first tone of his voice—the first sound of his footstep, would move the whole blood within me. I do believe the very proxi-

mity of his spirit would make my whole frame thrill, and I should know that he was present before one of my senses assured me of the fact. My father! oh, my father! could you rejoin your son, should I meet you as a stranger, or bow before you as a ruler?"

"It is not her fault, Lorenzo," said her cousin, eagerly, zealous in her friend's cause; "I do not know how to tell you what he is, Lorenzo. He is hard, yet not tyrannical; cold, yet not without affection. There is no tenderness in him, yet he loves her better than aught else on earth, except, I have heard my grandfather say, except ambition. He is liberal to her, allowing her all she wants or wishes, except, indeed, his tenderness and care. You and I are both orphans, Lorenzo, and perhaps we let our fancy lead us to picture exaggerated joy in the love and affection of parents."

"I love him not, Bianca," answered the young man, with a slight shudder; "there is something in his look which seems to chill the blood in one's heart. I can see in that gaze which he bends

upon her, why it is her arms are not thrown round his neck, why her lips are not pressed to his, why words of love and affection are not poured forth upon her father when she meets him after a long absence. She is his child, but he is not a father to her—perhaps a tyrant.”

“Oh, no, no!” answered the young girl; “he loves her—indeed he does; and he does not tyrannize over her. But whether it is that there is a natural coldness in his manner, or that he affects a certain Roman hardness, I cannot tell; he only shows his love in indulging her in every thing she desires, without a tender look or tender word, such as most fond fathers bestow upon a well-loved child.”

“And such a child!” said Lorenzo, musing. “Well, it is strange, Bianca; perhaps he may love her truly, and more than many fathers whom I have seen in France fondle their children as if their whole soul was wrapped up in them, and then sacrifice their happiness to the merest caprice—perhaps it may be so, and yet I do not like his

looks. I cannot like him. See how he gazes at us now! It is the gaze of a serpent, cold, and hard, and stony. Who was her mother? She can have gained no part of her nature from him."

"Oh, no," cried the young girl, feeling all that he felt, though unwilling to allow it; "she is like him in nothing, except, indeed, the forehead and the shape of her face. Her mother was almost as beautiful as she is. I remember well; it is not three years since she died. She was a great heiress in the Ghiaradadda. All she had was on her marriage secured by the forms of law to herself and her children, and they say he strove almost cruelly to make her give it up to him. After her death he obtained possession of it, but not entirely for himself. It was decided that he should possess it till Leonora married, making suitable provision for her maintenance, but that, when she married, the great estates at Castellano should go to her and her husband. My grandfather, who was her mother's uncle, took much interest in the matter, and for a time he and

Signor d'Orco were at bitter enmity; but when the case was decided, and it was found that Leonora's father assigned her more for her portion than the law would have demanded, my grandfather became convinced that he had striven only for what he conceived a right, and became reconciled to him. Indeed, he is quite liberal in all things concerning her; allows her the revenue of a princess, and is himself a man of small expense; but it seems his is an unbending nature. He lets her do what she wills in most things—seldom thwarts her; but when he speaks his own will, there is no appeal from it—neither to his heart nor his mind. I can often persuade my grandfather, though he is quick and hasty, as you know, and sometimes convince him, but it is of no use to try to do either with Ramiro d'Orco."

Lorenzo fancied he comprehended, at least in a degree, the character which, in her youthful way, she strove to depict; but yet there was something in the look of Leonora's father which left a dark, unpleasant impression upon his

mind. There are faces that we love not, but which afford no apparent reason for the antipathy they produce. There is often even beauty which we cannot admire—grace which affords no pleasure. There is, perhaps, nothing more graceful upon earth than the gliding of a snake, never for a moment quitting what the great moral painter called “the line of beauty.” There is nothing more rich and resplendent than his jewelled skin, and yet how few men can gaze upon the most gorgeous of that reptile race without a shuddering sensation of its enmity to man? Can it be that in the breast of the reasoning human creature, God, for a farther security than mere intellect against a being that is likely to injure, implants an instinct of approaching danger which no fairness of form, no engagingness of manner can at first compensate? It may be so. At all events, I have seen instances were something very like it was apparent. And yet, with time, the impression wears away; the spirit has spoken once its word of warning; if that word is not enough,

it never speaks again. The snake has the power of fascinating the bird which, in the beginning, strove to escape from him; and we forget the monitor which told us our danger.

In an hour from that time Lorenzo was sitting at the same table with Ramiro d'Orco, listening well pleased to searching and deep views of the state of Italy, expressed, not indeed with eloquence, for he was not an eloquent man, but with a force and point he had seldom heard equalled.

It would not be easy to give his words, for, even were they recorded, they would lose their strength in the translation; but the substance we know, and it would give a very different picture of Italy in that day from any that can be drawn at present. We see it not alone dimmed by the distance of time, but in a haze of our own prejudices. We may gather, perhaps, the great results; but we can, I believe, in no degree divine the motives, and most of the details are lost. Read the history of any one single man in those days, as portrayed by modern writers, and com-

pare one author with another. Take for instance that of Lorenzo de Medici, as carefully drawn by Roscoe, or brightly sketched by Sismondi. What can be more different? The facts, indeed, are the same, but how opposite are all the inferences. In both we have the dry bones of the man, but the form of the muscle, and the hue of the complexion are entirely at variance. Writers who undertake to represent the things of a past age are like a painter required to furnish portraits of persons long dead. Tradition may give them some guidance as to the general outline, but the features and the colouring will be their own.

It is therefore with the great facts of the state of Italy at that time that I will deal, as nearly in the view of Ramiro d'Orco as I can; but it must be remembered that his view also was not without its mistiness. If we cannot see clearly on account of the remoteness of the objects which we contemplate, his vision also was indistinct, obscured by the prejudices of class, interest, party, hope, apprehension. and, above all, ambition. He painted the condition of Italy only as

Ramiro d'Orco believed it to be. How much even of that belief was to be ascribed to his own desires and objects, who can say?

Lombardy, the great northern portion of Italy, indeed, had ever been isolated from the rest in manners and habits of thought. Italians the Lombards certainly were; but the characteristics of the Northern conquerors predominated in that portion of the peninsula. Except at Genoa and in Venice, republicanism in no shape had taken any deep root. From very early times, although the voice of the people had occasionally proclaimed a republic here and there, the babe was strangled ere it got strength, even by those that gave it birth. The epoch of democratic independence in Lombardy lasted barely a century and a half. No republic flourished long north of the River Po, except those I have named, and even the two which took some glory from the name little deserved it. Less real liberty was known in Venice than perhaps existed under the most grinding tyranny of a single man; and Genoa, in her most palmy days, was a prey to

aristocratic factions, which soon made the people but slaves to princes. But it must not be supposed that nothing was obtained in return: a more chivalrous and warlike spirit existed in that division of Italy than in the central portion. It was not so early refined, but it was not so speedily softened. Corrupt it might be, and indeed was, to even a fearful degree; but it was the corruption of the hard and the daring, rather than of the weak and effeminate. Men poisoned, and slew, and tortured each other, and the minds of all became so familiar with blood and horror that much was endured before resistance to oppression was excited; but conspiracies were generally successful in their primary object, because the conspirators were bold and resolute. A tyrant might fall only to give place to another tyrant, but still he fell; and you rarely saw in Lombardy such weakness as was displayed in the enterprise of the Pazzi.

Men in the North fought openly in the field for counties, and marquisates, and dukedoms; but there was little finesse or diplomatic skill

displayed except by Venice. There was cunning, indeed, but it was always exercised to gain some military advantage. The ambition of that part of the land was warlike, not peaceful. It was not luxury, and ease, and graceful enjoyment that was desired in combination with power, but it was splendour, and pomp, and domination. Weak tyrants were sure to fall; merely cruel ones generally retained their power; and cunning ones were frequently successful; but it was only by wielding the sword, either by their own hands or those of others.

At the time in which Ramiro D'Orco spoke, every vestige of liberty was extinct in Lombardy. The Visconti, and after them the Sforzi, in Milan; the house of Della Scala, and after them the Visconti, in Verona; the Gonzagas in Mantua; the D'Estes in Ferrara; the Carraras in Padua; the Bentivogli in Bologna, and a hundred other princely houses, had attained power by both policy and the sword, and Genoa had passed frequently from anarchy to subjection, and sub-

jection to anarchy. But the great military school of Alberic de Barbiano had raised up a vigorous and healthy spirit in the people, which, had it lasted, would have secured to both Romagna and Lombardy strength to resist foreign enemies, even if it could not control intestine divisions. But the great company of St. George, founded by Barbiano, was succeeded by two others, who, though they possessed all the energy of their predecessors, and were led by men of very superior abilities, were merely the companies of adventurous soldiers known as the Bracceschi and Sforzeschi. Their swords were at the command of those who could pay them best, and their leaders were men who sought to found dynasties upon military success. In this object Braccio de Montana failed. He was mortally wounded at Aquila in 1424, and his formidable band gradually dispersed, after having passed under the command of several others. Though Sforza perished in passing the Pescara ere he attained the power at which he aimed,

the object was accomplished by his son Francesco, who established himself in the ducal throne of Milan.

Thus, at the time when Ramiro d'Orco spoke, in 1494, the whole of Lombardy was under the domination of various princes, commonly and not unjustly called tyrants; but the chivalrous spirit of the people was by no means extinct; and even the course of the arts showed the tendency of the popular mind. It is true, Milan itself was more famous for the manufacture and even the invention of arms than for the fine arts, but in the pictures of that country during this and the preceding centuries, saints and martyrs, angels and demons are frequently represented in knightly harness, and in some it would be difficult to distinguish the messenger of peace from one of the terrible legionaries of the great companies.

It seemed, indeed, as if Lombardy had returned to its normal feudal notions, in which chivalry was inseparably attached to monarchy and aristocracy.

The central states of Italy clung to republi-

can forms of government long after they had been extinguished in the north; but it was republicanism founded upon wealth, not upon purity of character or simplicity of manners—no, nor upon real patriotism. A celebrated writer of late days has spoken of “the virtue of Florence” in this very century. Let us see how that virtue was depicted by the best judges of the times of which he, at this late day, speaks. “I never imagined,” said Piero de Medici, father of Lorenzo, on his death-bed, addressing the chief citizens of Florence, “that times would come when the conduct of my friends would force me to esteem and long for the society of my enemies, and wish that I had been defeated instead of victorious.” He then went on to reproach them with their vices and their crimes. “You rob your neighbours of their wealth,” he said, “you sell justice, you evade the law, you oppress the weak, and exalt the insolent. There are not, throughout all Italy, so many and such dreadful examples of violence and avarice as in this city.”

Again Machiavelli describes the youth of Flo-

rence as having become "more dissolute than ever, more extravagant in dress, feasting and other licentiousness," and says that, "being without employment they wasted their time and means on gaming and women, their principal care being how to appear splendid in apparel, and obtain a crafty shrewdness in discourse." Nor can I look upon the persevering efforts of that republic to subjugate all the neighbouring cities as a proof of virtue or of love of liberty.

Their military virtues seem to have been upon a par with their domestic qualities. Their battles were fought by hired mercenaries, and where the Florentine forces did appear in the field, they apparently merited the reproach which Machiavelli casts upon the military in general of the central and southern portions of Italy. In describing the campaign of 1467, he says, "A few slight skirmishes took place, but, in accordance with the custom of the time, neither of them acted on the offensive, besieged any town, or gave the other any opportunity of coming to a general battle; but each kept within its tents,

and they conducted themselves with the most remarkable pusillanimity." Indeed, his description of all the battles in which none of the great condottieri were engaged, is merely ludicrous. Moreover, the political virtues of the people seem, at this time at least, not to have surpassed those of the heart and mind. Florence had the name of a republic, but its government was in reality an oligarchy. There is a consciousness in man that persons whose time is devoted to daily labour have not those opportunities of mental culture and that leisure for deep thought which alone can fit men for the task of leading and governing. However strong may be democratic sentiment, however jealously tenacious of the name of equality citizens may be, there is, in the natural course of all communities, a tendency to produce an aristocracy. In the warring elements of a political chaos, the first efforts of order are to resolve the people into classes—nay, into castes. The hatred of hereditary authority generally directs these efforts to elevate riches to the highest place. The wealthy, in

whom one sort of pre-eminence is already obvious, are not so obnoxious at first sight as those who have no real source of influence but the intangible one of birth; and thus from republics, founded frequently upon purely democratic principles, generally rises the most hateful and debasing of all aristocracies, the aristocracy of wealth. This had long been the case with Florence at the time I speak of: wealth was nobility, and that nobility was rapidly tending toward monarchy. Lorenzo de Medici had exercised until his death, in April, 1492, an anomalous sovereignty, denied the character of prince of a monarchical state, and yet divested of the restraints of a magistrate of a free people. He was addressed by all public bodies, and all private persons as "Most Magnificent Lord," and swayed the destinies of the country, influenced the character of the people, and deeply affected the fate of all Italy, without any legal right or actual station. His was solely a monarchy of influence, and, though even Crom-

well felt the necessity of giving to his power the sanction of a name, Lorenzo ruled his countrymen till his death in the character of a citizen.

The south of Italy had in the mean time passed through several phases, and the monarchical element had long predominated in its government. The only question was to whom it should belong. Foreign families struggled for the often contested throne; and Italians then only drew their swords or raised their voices in favor of one or another usurper. The destinies of the north and the south were sealed; and in Tuscany no wide field was offered for ambition. A man might raise himself to a certain degree by subservience to some powerful prince, but he must continue to serve that prince, or he fell, and would never aspire to independent domination where hereditary power was recognized by the people, and lay at the foundation of all acknowledged authority. It was alone in central Italy,

and especially in Romagna and in the States of the Church--where a principle antagonistic to all hereditary claims existed in the very nature of the Papal power—that any adventurer could hope, either by his individual genius or courage, or by services rendered to those who already held authority, to raise himself to independent rule, or to that station which was only attached to a superior by the thin and nearly worn-out thread of feudal tenure.

“Those who would find fortune,” said Ramiro d’Orco, “such fortune as Francesco Sforza conquered and the Medici attained, must seek it at Rome. There is the field, the only field still open to the bold spirit, the strong, unwavering heart, the keen and clear-seeing mind—there is the table on which the boldest player is sure to win the most. With every change of the papacy, new combinations, and, consequently, new opportunities must arise, and, thanks to the wise policy of the college of cardinals, those changes must be frequent. A man there

may, as elsewhere, be required to serve in order at length to command; but if he do not obtain power at length, it is his fault or Fortune's, and in either case he must abide the consequences. Good night, Signor Rovera."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHAT is it, dear girl?—Let me think!" said Leonora to her young cousin. They sat in a small ante-room between their sleeping chambers, which gave entrance from the corridor to each.

"And what would you think of, Leonora?" asked Bianca, laughing wickedly.

Leonora gazed from the window, whence was seen the garden below bathed in moonlight, with faint glimpses of the distant country, and the sparkle of the rays upon the fountain whose voice came murmuring up. She did not answer, but continued silent, with her cheek resting

on her hand, and her arm upon the sill of the window.

"I know right well whom you are thinking of," said Bianca, bending down her head so as to gaze upon the beautiful face.

"Not you," said Leonora; "I am thinking of my father; and how strange it is that he who loves me well, I know, should show his love so little."

"Can you think of two things at once, Leonora?" asked her cousin, "for I know one thing you are thinking of, and you tell me of another. You are thinking of Lorenzo Visconti; and how strange it is that you, who love him well, have not the heart to own it to yourself."

"Go, go, you are a silly child," answered Leonora, "you cannot know what love is, nor I either, except love for your parents or your kinsfolk. I think not of Lorenzo Visconti; he is a comely youth, and pleasant in his conversation; but he will go hence in a day, forget me in another, and I him before the third evening comes. You want to make me fall in love with

him, but I tell you, Blanche, you will tire me of him."

"Faith, I do not want you to love him," replied Bianca, "for I am half in love with him myself, and can't spare him—only, you know, there is an obstacle."

"Well, well, go and sleep over it," replied Leonora, "then rise to-morrow, and whisper gently in his ear that, if he will but wait a year or two—this loving land and warm climate notwithstanding—he can wed the beautiful heiress of the house of Rovera, and—But what obstacle do you talk of, Blanche?"

"The Church! the Church!" replied the other girl; "we are full cousins, you know, Leonora—within the forbidden degrees. My mother's eldest sister was his mother."

"But a poor obstacle," answered Leonora; "one of the two bags of the Church is always open to take in gold, and the other to let out dispensations."

"Yes: but somehow I can never look on him as aught else but a cousin," replied Bianca—"a

sort of brother. As such I love him well; but as I said, I am only half in love with him—a fraternal love, which is a half love, I suppose. I do not know much about it; but I do not judge I could let him kiss me so coolly if I loved him any better. Bless my poor heart, Leonora, we were boy and girl together when we were in Florence, and were we to marry, I should always think him playfellow instead of husband. But I'll to bed and sleep; I have nothing to keep me awake. You go to bed and sleep, if you can. I know you, Leonora.”

“No, you do not,” murmured her cousin; “but I shall sit up and look at the moonlight for a time.”

“And wish that the nightingale had not ceased to sing true-love ditties,” replied Bianca gaily. “Well, good night. Leave the doors open, that I may hear if you sigh about Lorenzo in your sleep.”

Bianca, or, as the French called her, Blanche Marie, then left her gaily, and with a light heart was soon asleep. Leonora d'Orco sat quite still

by the window, and gazed forth. All was still and tranquil. The air was clear and soft, and yet there seemed a sort of haze—a haze of brightness over the landscape. Have you never remarked, reader, especially in southern climates, that the moon sometimes pours forth her pale rays in such profusion that it seems as if a mist of light spread over the scene? So was it at that moment; and though the nightingale, as Blanche Marie had said, no longer trilled his summer song, yet every now and then a note or two from his sweet voice burst upon the ear—a song, begun as if in memory, and broken off as if in despair. The time of love was past, and he could sing no more; but the remembrance of happy days woke up under the warm autumn splendour, and a few short plaintive notes came welling from the fountains of regret.

Of what was the young maiden thinking? What feelings woke up in her bosom under that bright moon?

What harmonious chord vibrated in her bosom

to the broken tones of the solitary songster of the night?

Gaze down into a deep, deep well, reader, and if you gaze long enough, you will catch an uncertain gleam of light, you know not whence, glisening upon the surface of waters below you; but you cannot fathom those waters with the eye, nor see aught that they cover; and so it is with the heart of woman to those who would scan it from a distance. If you would know what is beneath, plunge down into its depths, torch in hand: you may perish, but you will know all that can be known of that most deep, mysterious thing.

At length there was the sound of a light foot-step on the terrace beneath, and Leonora started and listened. The foot that produced the sound was still distant, and she quietly glided through the open door into her cousin's chamber. Blanche Marie was already sleeping peacefully, the light covering hardly veiling the contour of the young beautiful limbs, the hair already escaped from

the net intended to restrain it, and the white uncovered arm cast negligently under the warm, rosy cheek. Her breathing was soft, and low, and even, and the half-open lips showed the pearly teeth between.

"How beautiful she is!" murmured Leonora; "and how sweet and gentle she looks! So looked Psyche;" and with a noiseless step she left the room, and closed the door behind her.

She took her seat near the window again, behind the rich deep moulding, as if she would see without being seen; but the lighted taper on the table cast her shadow across without her knowing it; and there she sat, and once more listened. The step was very, very near now, and the next instant it stopped beneath the window. Then came a silent pause for a moment, and Leonora's heart beat.

"Bianca," said the voice of Lorenzo, "is that you, dear cousin?"

Leonora was strongly tempted to say yes, but yet she felt ashamed of the positive falsehood,

and, with a sort of compromise with conscience, she answered, almost in a whisper :

"Hush ! speak low."

"Which is Leonora's chamber?" asked the voice again.

"Why?" demanded the young girl, in the same low tone, but with strange sensations in her bosom.

"I wish to sing to her," answered the youth, "and to tell her all I dared not tell this evening. I am ordered to Pavia early to-morrow, dear cousin, and must leave you to plead my cause, but I would fain say one word for myself first."

Oh, how Leonora's heart beat.

"Then it is not Bianca," she murmured to herself; "it is not Bianca. The next room on your right," she answered, still speaking low; but suddenly there came upon her a feeling of shame for the deception, and she added, "What is it you would say, Lorenzo? Leonora is here; Bianca has been sleeping for an hour. But don't sing, and speak low. Signor Rovera's apartments are close by."

But Lorenzo would not heed the warning;
and though he did not raise his voice to its full
power, he sang, in a sweet, low tone, a little can-
zonetta, which had much currency some few years
before in Florence :

"What time the Greek, in days of yore,
Bent down his own fair work before,
He woke the echoes of the grove
With words like these, 'Oh, could she love!'"

Heaven heard the sculptor's wild desire ;
Love warmed the statue with its fire ;
But when he saw the marble move,
He asked, still fearful, "Will she love?"

She loved—she loved ; and wilt thou be
More cold; Madonna unto me ?
Then hear my song, and let me prove
If you can love—if you can love."

"Songs are false—men are false, Lorenzo,"
answered Leonora, bending a little from the
window : "you will sing that canzonetta to the
next pretty eye you see."

"It will be Leonora's then," answered the
youth. "Can you not come down, dear Leonora,
and let me hear my fate under the olive trees?
I fear to tell you all I feel in this place, lest other

ears should be listening. Oh! come down, for I must go hence by daybreak to-morrow."

"Oh! do not go so soon," murmured Leonora; "I will be down and on the terrace by daybreak; but to-night—no, no, Lorenzo, I cannot, for very maiden shame, come down to-night. There, take my glove, Lorenzo, and if I find you still wear it for my sake when next we meet, I shall know—and then, perhaps—perhaps I will tell you more. But there is some one coming—fly! fly!—the other way. He is coming from the east end of the terrace."

"I never turned my back on friend or foe," answered Lorenzo, turning to confront the new-comer.

Leonora drew back from the window and put out the light, but she listened with eager ears. "It was very like my father's figure," she thought; "his height, his walk, but yet, methinks, stouter. Hark! that is not his voice—one of the servants, perhaps."

The next instant there was a clash of steel, and she ran anxiously to the window. At some

twenty yards distance she saw Lorenzo, sword in hand, defending himself against a man apparently much more powerful than himself. For a moment or two she gazed, bewildered, and not knowing what to do. Lorenzo at first seemed to stand entirely on the defensive; but soon his blood grew hot, and, in answer to his adversary's lunge, he lunged again; but the other held a dagger in his left hand, and with it easily parried the blade. The next pass she saw her lover stagger. She could bear no more, and, running down, she screamed aloud to wake the servants, who slept near the hall. An old man, a porter, was still dozing in a chair, and started up, exclaiming:

"What is it? what is it, signorina?"

"Haste! haste! Bring your halbert!" cried Leonora, pulling back slowly the great heavy door, and running down the steps; "there is murder about."

She fancied she should behold Lorenzo already fallen before his more vigorous enemy; but, on the contrary, he was now pressing him hard

with an agility and vigour which outweighed the strength of maturity on the part of the other. All was as clear in the bright moonlight as if the sun had been shining; and, as Leonora sprung forward, she beheld, or thought she beheld, her lover's assailant gain some advantage. Lorenzo was pressed back along the terrace towards the spot where she stood. He seemed to fly, though still with his face to his adversary, but he had been well disciplined to arms in Italy as well as France, and knew every art of defence or assault. The space between him and his foe increased till he nearly reached the young girl's side, and then, with a sudden bound, like that of a lion, he sprang upon his enemy and passed his guard. What followed Leonora could not see; it was all the work of a moment; but the next instant she beheld the elder man raise his hand as if to strike with his dagger, drop it again, and fall back heavily upon the terrace.

Lorenzo leaned upon his sword, and seemed seeking to recover breath, while Leonora ran up

to him, asking, "Are you hurt? are you hurt, Lorenzo?"

Ere he could answer there were many people around them. No house in Italy was unaccustomed to such scenes in those days. Indeed, scenes much more terrible habituated every body, servants, masters, retinue, to wake at the first call, and to have every thing ready for resistance and defence. A number of the attendants poured forth from the door she had left open, some with useless torches lighted, some with arms in their hands. Then came her father, Ramiro d'Orco, and last, the old Count Rovera himself, while Blanche Marie appeared at the window above, eagerly asking what had befallen.

No one answered her, but the Signor d'Orco advanced calmly to the side of the fallen man, gazed at him for a moment, and then turned to Lorenzo, asking, "Is he dead?"

"I know not," replied the young man, sheathing his sword.

"Who is he?" demanded Ramiro again.

"Neither know I that," said the youth; "he attacked me unprovoked as I walked here upon the terrace in the moonlight; but I never saw his face before, that I knew of."

"Walked and sang," answered Ramiro, drily. "Perhaps he did not like your music, Signor Visconti."

"Probably," replied the youth, quite calmly. "It was but poor, and yet not worth killing a man for. Besides, as it was not intended for him, but for a lady, it could give him no offence."

"Not quite clear logic that, good youth," answered Ramiro. "Do any of you know this man?" he continued, turning to the servants.

"Not I," "not I," answered several; but the old Count of Rovera bent down his head toward the man's face, waving the rest away that the moonlight might fall upon him. "Why, this is Pietro Buondoni, of Ferrara!" he exclaimed; "an attendant on Count Ludovico, and a great favorite. What could induce him to attack you, Lorenzo?"

"I know not, sir," replied Lorenzo; "I never set eyes on him before. He called me a French hound, and, ere I could answer him, he had nearly run me through the body. I had hardly time to draw."

"Well, bear him in—bear him in," said the old lord; "though I judge from his look he will not attack any one again. Did I not see Leonora here?"

But by this time she was gone, and Lorenzo took care not to answer. As he followed the rest into the villa, however, he stooped to pick up something from the ground. What if it were a lady's glove!

CHAPTER VII.

THE servants bore Buondoni into the great hall; but it was in vain they attempted for a moment or two to rouse him into consciousness again. There was no waking from the sleep that was upon him. Lorenzo's sword, thrust home, had passed through and through his body, piercing his heart as it went. Very different were the sensations of the different persons who gazed upon his great, powerful limbs and handsome face, as he lay in death before them. Ramiro d'Orco could hardly be said to feel anything. It was a sight which he had looked on often. Death, in the abstract, touched him in no way. To see a man take any one of his ordinary meals

or die was the same to him. It was an incident in the world's life—no more. He had no weak sympathies, no thrilling sensibilities, no fanciful shudderings at the extinction of human life. A man was dead—that was all. In that man he had no personal interests. He knew him not. There had been no likelihood that he ever would know him; if anything, less probability that that man could ever have served him, and therefore there seemed nothing to regret. Neither had there been any chance that Buondoni could ever have injured him, therefore there could be no matter for rejoicing; but yet, if anything, there was a curious feeling of satisfaction, rather than otherwise, in his breast. Death—the death of others—was a thing not altogether displeasing to him. He knew not why it was so, and perhaps it sometimes puzzled him, for he had been known to say, when he heard a passing-bell, “Well, there is one man less in the world! There are fools enough left.”

Old men grow hardened to such things, and in the ordinary course of nature, as their own days

become less and less, as life with them becomes more and more a thing of the past, they estimate the death of others, as they would estimate their own approaching fate, but lightly. The old Count Rovera looked with but very little feeling upon the dead man; but he thought of his young relation Lorenzo, and of what might be the consequences to him. At first, when he remembered that this man had been a great favourite with Ludovic the Moor, and thus another offence had been offered by a Visconti to a Sforza, he entertained some fears for the youth's safety. But then the recollection of the King of France's powerful protection gave him more confidence, and his sympathies went no farther.

The feelings of Lorenzo himself were very different; but as they were such as would be experienced by most young men unaccustomed to bloodshed in looking for the first time upon an enemy slain by their own hands, we need not dwell much upon them. There was the shuddering impression which the aspect of death always makes upon young, exuberant life. There wa

the natural feeling of regret at having extinguished that which we can never reilluminate. There was that curious, almost fearful inquiry which springs up in the thoughtful mind at the sight of the dead, when our eyes are not much accustomed to it, "What is life?"

While he was still gazing, one of the servants touched the old count's arm and whispered something to him. "Ha!" cried Rovera; "I am told, Lorenzo, you received a letter to-night, which was sent up to your room by one of your men, after we all parted. It was not a challenge, perchance? If so, you should have chosen some other place for your meeting than our terrace."

"It was not so, sir," replied Lorenzo, promptly. "I had no previous quarrel with the man. The letter was from his majesty, King Charles. Here it is; you can satisfy yourself."

"My eyes are dim," said the old man; "read, it, Ramiro."

The Lord of Orco took the paper, and read while one of the servants held a flambeau near.

"WELL-BELOVED COUSIN"—so ran the note

—"It has pleased us to bestow on you the troop of our ordnance, become vacant by the death of Monsieur de Moustier. We march hence speedily and the Seigneur de Vitry proceeds to-night toward Pavia. As he will not be able to depart till late in the day, we judge it best to advise you, in order to your preparation, that he will halt near the Villa Rovera for an hour to-morrow early, and that we expect you will accompany him on his march without delay. Fail not as you would merit our favour.

"CHARLES."

Ramiro read the letter aloud, and then, without any comment on the contents, remarked:

"You have left the impress of your thumb in blood upon the king's missive, Signor Visconti; you are wounded, mayhap."

"Ah! a scratch—a mere scratch in my right shoulder," answered Lorenzo; "I could not completely parry one of his first thrusts, and he touched me, but it is nothing."

"Oh, you are hurt, Lorenzo! you are hurt!" cried Bianca Maria, who had come down from

her chamber, and was standing behind the little circle which had gathered round the dead man.

"Get you to bed, child!" said the old count sharply; "these are no matters for you. Your cousin has but a scratch. Get you to bed, girl, I say, this is a pretty pass, that two men cannot fight without having all the women in the house for witnesses!"

In the mean time Ramiro d'Orco had raised the left hand of the dead man, in which was still firmly clasped his poinard—his sword had fallen out of the right when he fell—and, taking a torch from one of the servants, he gazed along the blade.

"This dagger is grooved for poison, Conte," he said, addressing his host in the same quiet, indifferent tone he generally used; "better look to the young gentleman's wound."

"I thank you, sir," replied Lorenzo; "but it came from his sword, not his poignard. I will retire and let my men stanch the bleeding."

"Better, at all events, apply some antidote," said Ramiro; "a little parsley boiled will ex-

tract most poisons, unless they remain too long. It were well to attend to it speedily."

"Well, I will go," replied Lorenzo; "but, I call Heaven to witness, I have no blame in this man's death. He attacked me unprovoked, and I killed him in self-defence."

"We must take measures to discover how this came about," said the count, thoughtfully. "Buondoni can not have come here unattended."

"Better perchance let it rest," said Ramiro d'Orco, "there may be motives at the bottom of the whole affair that were not well brought to the surface. I have gathered little from to-night's discourse of this youth's history; but he is a Visconti, and that alone may make him powerful enemies, who had better still be his enemies than yours, father."

"I fear them not," replied the old nobleman; "let diligent inquiry be made around and on the road to Pavia for any stranger arrived this night. Now, Ramiro, come with me for a while, and we will talk farther. Lights, boys, on there in my

cabinet. You are in your night gear, signor; but I will not keep you long ere I let you to your slumbers again."

"They will be my first slumbers," answered Ramiro. "I had not closed an eye when I heard talking, and singing, and then clashing of swords — no unusual combinations in our fair land, Signor Rovera."

As he spoke he followed the old count into a small, beautiful room, every panel of which held a picture, of great price then, and invaluable now as specimens of the first revival of art. When they were seated and the doors closed, the elder man fell into a fit of thought, though he had invited the conference, and Ramiro d'Orco spoke first.

"Who is this young Visconti?" he asked; "and how comes the King of France to give him cousinship?"

"Why, he is the son of that Carlo Visconti who stabbed Galeazzo Sforza," answered the count, "and was killed in the church. The boy was carried by some of his relations to his god-

father, Lorenzo de Medici, and educated by him."

"Then 'tis Ludovic's doing," said Ramiro; "he has sent this man to make away with him, though that was a bad return for his father's kind act in lifting him to power. By my faith he should have raised and honoured the boy. That good stroke of a dagger was worth three quarters of a dukedom to the good prince. But I suppose, from all I learn, that the youth is now trying adventure as a soldier."

"Soldier he is under the King of France," answered the old man; "but an adventurer he hardly can be called, for he has large estates in Tuscany. When Ludovic seized the regency, he was fain to court Lorenzo de Medici for support, and right willingly he agreed to change the estates of his brother's executioner for the lands which his father Francesco had obtained in gratuity from Florence. No, he is wealthy enough, and if he serves, it is but for honor or ambition."

"But how is he cousin to the King of France?"

asked Ramiro; "it is a cousinship of much value as events are passing nowadays."

"Why, do you not recollect?" asked the old man, somewhat testily, "that Valentina Visconti married Louis, brother of Charles the Sixth of France, grandfather of the present Duke of Orleans, who will one day be King of France too, if the marriage of this young king be sterile. Three years have passed without any prospect of another heir, and then the future of this youth is bright indeed."

"It is," answered Ramiro; and, after a moment's thought, he added, "I suppose you intend to marry him to your granddaughter."

"Good sooth, they may do as they like, Ramiro," answered the old man. "I have made marriages for my children, and seen none of them happy or successful. Some remorse—at least regret—lies in the thought. I have but this child left for all kindred, and she shall make her marriage for herself. I may give advice, but will use no compulsion. In truth, I one time

sought her union with Lorenzo, for he is not only full of promise, rich, noble, allied to royal houses both of France and England, but, with high spirit, there is allied in him a tenderness and love but rarely found. I marked it in him early, when he was page to that magnificent prince his godfather. The other lads, who loved or seemed to love him, were sure to prosper through his advocacy of merits less than his own. In furtherance of my wish, I had Bianca brought up with him in Florence; but, like an unskilful archer, I fear I have overshot my mark. The one is as a brother to the other; and I believe she would as soon marry her brother as Lorenzo. On his part I know not what the feelings are. He seems to love her well, but still with love merely fraternal, if one may judge by eyes and looks. I've seen more fire in one glance at Leonora than in poor Lorenzo's life was given to any other. But this unfortunate fight may breed mischief, I fear. If Ludovic sent the man to kill him, he will not soon be off the track of blood. Thank Heaven! he is soon going on."

"I think there is no fear," replied Ramiro, "unless Buondoni's blade was well anointed. Ludovic is too wise to follow him up too fiercely. We may run down our game eagerly enough upon our own lands, but do not carry the chase into the lands of another, Signor Rovera."

"As soon as Lorenzo can rejoin the King of France, he is safe," rejoined the Count, "and methinks, till then, I can take care, of him. I know the look of a poisoner or assassin at a street's distance. Only let us look to his wound; I have known one of the same scratches end a good strong man's life in a few hours."

"So say I," answered Ramiro, "but I will go out and walk upon the terrace. I feel not disposed to sleep. If you should want me, call me in. I know something of poisons and their antidotes; I studied them when I was in Padua; for, in this life, no one knows how often one may be called upon to practise such chirurgy on his own behalf."

Thus saying, he left the Count de Rovera, and while the other, half dressed as he was, hurried

up to Lorenzo's chamber, Ramiro, with his usual calm and almost noiseless step, went forth and walked the terrace up and down. For more than an hour he paced it from end to end, with all his thoughts turned inward. "A distant cousin of this King of France," he thought, "and almost german to his apparent heir! Wealthy himself and full of high courage! The lad must rise—ay, high, high! He has it in his look. Such are the men upon whose rising fortunes one should take hold, and be carried up with them. It was surely Leonora's voice I heard talking with him from the windows. If so, Fortune has arranged all well; yet one must be careful—no too rapid steps. We fly from that which seeks us—run after that which flies. I will mark them both well, and shut my eyes, and let things take their course, or else raise some small difficulties, soon overleaped, to give the young lover fresh ardor in the chase. Pity he is so young—and yet no pity either. It will afford us time to see how far he reaches."

"With such thoughts as these he occupied

himself so deeply that his eyes were seldom raised from the ground on which he trod. At length, however, he looked up toward the windows; and there was one in which the lights still burned, while figures might be seen, from time to time, passing across.

"That must be his chamber," said Ramiro to himself. "I fear the blade was poisoned, and that it has had some effect. I must go and see. 'Twere most unlucky such a chance should escape me. Let me see; where is that snake-stone I had? It will extract the venom," and, entering the house, he mounted the stairs rapidly to Lorenzo's chamber.

He found him sick indeed. The whole arm and shoulder were greatly swollen; and while the old count stood beside his bed with a look of anxious fear, a servant held the young man up to ease his troubled respiration. Lorenzo's face seemed that of a dying man—the features pale and sharp, the eye dull and glassy.

"Send for a clerk," said the youth; "there

is no time for notaries; but I wish my last testament taken down and witnessed."

"Cheer up, cheer up, my good young friend," said Ramiro. "What! you are very sick; the blade was poisoned, doubtless."

"It must be so," said the young man, faintly; "I feel it in every vein."

"Well, well, fear not," answered Ramiro; "I have that at hand which will soon draw out the poison. Here, man," he continued, speaking to one of the attendants, who half filled the room, "run to my chamber. On the stool near the window you will find a leathern bag; bring it to me with all speed. You, sir, young page, speed off to the buttery, and bring some of the strongest of the water of life which the house affords. It killed the King of Navarre, they say, but it will help to give life to you, Lorenzo."

"The bottigliere will not let me have it, sir," replied the boy.

"Here, take my ring," said the old count; "make haste—make haste!"

The boy had hardly left the room, when the servant first despatched returned with the leather bag for which he had been sent. It was soon opened, and, after some search, Ramiro took forth a small packet, and unfolded rapidly paper after paper, which covered apparently some very precious thing within, speaking quietly as he did so:

"This is one of those famous snake-stones," he said, "which, when a man is bitten by any reptile, be it as poisonous as the Egyptian asp, will draw forth the venom instantly from his veins. Heaven knows, but I know not, whether it is a natural substance provided for the cure of one of nature's greatest evils, or some cunningly invented mithridate compounded by deep science. I bought it at a hundred times its weight in gold from an old and renowned physician at Padua; and it is certain a cure for the case of a poisoned dagger-wound as for the bite of a snake. Ah! here it is! have care the place where the sword entered."

"Pity it came not a little sooner," said Lo-

renzo's servant, taking off some bandages from his master's shoulder; "physic is late for a dying man."

Ramiro d'Orco gave him a look that seemed to pierce him like a dagger, for the man drew back as if he had been struck, and almost suffered his master to fall back upon the bed.

"Hold him up, fool!" said Ramiro, sternly; and, holding the wound, which had been stanchèd, wide open with one hand till the blood began to flow again, he placed what seemed a small brownish stone, hardly bigger than a pea in the aperture, and then bound the bandages tightly round the spot.

"That boy comes not," he said; "some of you run and hasten him."

But ere his orders could be obeyed the page returned, with a large silver flagon and a Venice glass on a salver.

"Now, Signor Visconti, drink this," said Ramiro, filling a glass and applying it to his lips.

Lorenzo drank, murmuring,—“It is like fire.”

“So is life,” answered Ramiro; “but you must drink three times, with a short interval. How feel you now?”

“Sick, sick, and faint,” replied Lorenzo. But some lustre had already come back into his eye; and after a short pause, Ramiro refilled the glass, saying,

“Here, drink again.”

The young man seemed to swallow more easily than before, and, in a moment or two after he had drunk, he said in a low voice,

“I feel better. That stone, or whatever it is, seems as it were sucking out the burning heat from the wound. I breathe more freely, too.”

“All is going well,” replied Ramiro. “One more draught, and, though you be not cured, and must remain for days, perchance, in your chamber, the enemy is vanquished. You shall have cheerful faces and sweet voices round you to soothe your confinement; but you must be

very still and quiet, lest the poison, settling in the wound itself, though we have drawn it from the heart, should beget gangrene. Bianca, your dear cousin, and my child Leonora, shall attend you. Here, drink again."

Lorenzo felt that with such sweet nurses he would not mind his wound; but the third draft revived him more than all. His voice regained its firmness, his eye its light. The sobbing, hard-drawn respiration gave way to easy, regular breathing; and, after a few minutes, he said,

"I feel almost well, and think I could sleep."

"All goes aright," said Ramiro; "you may sleep now in safety. That marvellous stone has already drawn into itself all the deadly venom that had spread through your whole blood. Nothing is wanting but quiet and support. Some one sit by him while he sleeps; and if perchance he wakes, give him another draught out of this tankard. Let us all go now, and leave him to repose."

"I will sit by him, signor," said the man

who had been supporting him; "for there be some who would not leave a drop in the tankard big enough to drown a flea, and I have sworn never to taste *aqua vitæ* again, since it nearly burst my head open at Rheims, in France."

Before he had done speaking Lorenzo was sound asleep; and while the servant let his head drop softly on the pillow, the rest silently quitted the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW hours earlier on the day of which we have just been speaking, a gallant band of men-at-arms rode forward on the highway between Milan and Pavia. It consisted of nearly four hundred lances, that is to say, of about eight hundred men. Had it been complete, the number would have amounted to many more, for the usual proportion was at least three inferior soldiers, esquires, or pages to each lance; but the eagerness of the young King of France to achieve what he believed would be an easy conquest had hurried his departure from France ere his musters were one half filled.

A short repose in Milan had sufficed to wipe away all stains of travel from his host; and the band of the Lord of Vitry appeared in all their accoutrements, what Rosalind calls "point de-vice." It is true, the day had been somewhat dry and sultry, and some dust had gathered upon splendid surcoats, and scarfs, and sword-knots; and the horses, so gay and full of spirit in the morning, now looked somewhat fatigued, but by no means jaded.

At their head rode their commander, a man of some thirty to two and thirty years of age, of a fine, manly person and handsome countenance, although the expression might be somewhat quick and hasty, and a deep scar on the brow rather marred the symmetry of his face. By his side, on a horse of much inferior power, but full of fire and activity, rode a man, not exactly in the garb of a servant, but yet plainly habited and nearly unarmed. Sword and dagger most men wore in those days, but he wore neither lance nor shield, cuirass nor back-piece. He carried a little black velvet cap upon his head,

with a long feather; and he rode in shoes of untanned leather, with long, sharp points, somewhat like a pod of mustard-seed.

"Are you sure you know the way, Master Tony?" asked De Vitry.

"I know the way right well, noble lord," replied the other; "but you do me too much honor to call me master. In Italy none is master but a man of great renown in the arts."

"Good faith, I know not what you are," answered the leader, "and I never could make out what young Lorenzo kept you always trotting at his heels for, like a hound after his master."

"You do me too much honor again, my lord," replied the other, "in comparing me to a hound."

"What, then, in Fortune's name, are you?" asked De Vitry, laughing.

"A mongrel," replied Antonio, "half French, half Italian; but pray, your lordship, don't adjure me by Fortune; for the blind goddess with the kerchief over her eyes has never been favorable to me all my life."

"Time she should change then," answered De Vitry.

"Oh, sir, she is like a school-boy," answered Antonio; "she never changes but from mischief to mischief; only constant in doing evil; and whichever side of her wheel turns uppermost, my lot is sure to slide down to the bottom. But here your lordship must turn off."

De Vitry was following on the road to which the other pointed, when a voice behind said:

"You are leaving the high road, my lord. If you look forward, you will see this is but a narrow lane."

"By my faith that is true," said the commander of the band; "you are not tricking me I trust, Master Antonio. Halt there—halt!"

"It might be fine fun to trick a French knight if I were my lord's jester," said Antonio, "but I have not arrived at that dignity yet."

"Where does that road lead to, then, sirrah?" demanded De Vitry, pointing to the one they were just leaving.

"To Pavia, my lord," replied the man; "but you will find this the shortest, and, I judge, the best."

There was a lurking smile upon Antonio's face, which De Vitry did not like; and, after but a moment's hesitation, he turned his horse back into the other path, saying:

"I will take the broad way; I never liked narrow or crooked paths in my life."

"I trust you will then allow me to follow the other, sir," said Antonio; "first because there is no use in trying to guide people who will not be guided, and, secondly, because I have something important to say to my young lord."

"No, sir—no," answered De Vitry sharply; "ride here by my side. To-morrow at farthest I will take care to know whether you have tried to deceive me: and if you have beware your ears."

"You will know to-night, my lord," said the man, "and my ears are in no danger, if you are not given, like many another gentleman, to cuffing other people for your own faults."

"You are somewhat saucy, sir," replied the marquis; "your master spoils you methinks."

The man saw that his companion was not to be provoked farther, and was silent while they rode onward.

It was now drawing towards evening, but the light had not yet faded; and De Vitry gazed around with a soldier's eye, scanning the military aspect of the country around.

"Is there not a river runs behind that ridge, Master Tony?" he asked at the end of ten minutes, with easily recovered good-humour.

"Yes, sir," replied the man shortly.

"And what castle is that on the left—there, far in the distance?"

"That is the castle of Sant' Angelo," answered António.

"Why, here is the river right before us," said De Vitry, "but where is the bridge?"

"Heaven knows," replied the man, with the same quiet smile he had borne before: "part of it, you may see, is standing on the other side,

and there are a few stones on this, if they can be of any service to your lordship. The rest took to travelling down toward the Po some month or two ago, and how far they have marched I cannot tell."

"Doubtless we can ford it," said De Vitry, in an indifferent tone.

"First send your enemy, my lord," replied Antonio, "then your friend, and then try it yourself—if you like."

"By my life, I have a mind to send you first, head foremost," replied the commander, sharply, but the next moment he burst into a good-humoured laugh, saying, "Well, what is to be done? The stream seems deep and strong. We did you wrong, Antonio. Now lead us right at all events."

"You did yourself wrong, and your own eyesight, my lord," answered the man, "for, if you had looked at the tracks on the road, you would have seen that all the ox-carts for the last month have turned off where I would have led you. You have only now to go back again."

"A hard punishment for a light fault," replied De Vitry. "Why told you me not this before, my good sir."

"Because, my lord, I have always thought St. Anthony, my patron, was wrong in preaching to fishes which have no ears. But we had better speed, sir, for it is touching upon evening, and night will have fallen before we reach Sant' Angelo. There you will find good quarters in the Borgo for your men; and, doubtless, the noble signor in the castle will come down at the first sound of your trumpets, and ask you and your prime officers to feast with him above. He is a noble lord, and loves the powers that be. Well, that the devil has not come upon earth in his day, for he would have entertained him royally and might have injured his means in honor of his guest."

De Vitry burst into another gay laugh, and, turning his horse's head, gave orders for his band to retrace their steps, upon which, of course, the young men commented as they would, while the

old soldiers obeyed without question, even in their thoughts.

Night had long fallen when they reached Sant' Angelo, a place then of much more importance than it is now, or has been for two centuries. But Antonio had been mistaken in supposing that De Vitry and his principal officers would be invited to lodge within the castle. The lord thereof was absent, knowing that the route of the King of France must be close to his residence. He was well aware that the attachment professed toward the young monarch by persons more powerful than himself was all hollow and deceptive, and that inferior men, in conflicts of great interests, always suffer, whose party soever they espouse. But he knew, too, that unexplained neutrality suffers more than all, and he resolved to absent himself from his lands on the first news of the arrival of the King of France in Italy, that he might seem to favor neither him nor his opponents, and yet not proclaim a neutrality which would make enemies of both.

The castle, indeed, would at once have opened its gates, had it been summoned; but De Vitry, knowing the king's anxiety to keep on good terms with all the Italian nobles of Lombardy, contented himself with lodgings in the humble inn of the place, and hunger made his food seem as good as any which the castle could have afforded. The supper passed gaily over; the men were scattered in quarters through the little borough; wine was with difficulty procured by any but the officers, and sober, perforce, the soldiery sought rest early. De Vitry and one or two others sat up late, sometimes talking, sometimes falling into fits of thought.

Antonio, in the meantime, had not even thought of rest. He had carefully attended to his horse, had ordered him to be fed, and seen him eat his food, and he stood before the door of the inn, gazing up at the moon, as if enjoying the calm sweetness of the soft Italian nights, but in reality meditating a farther ride as soon as all the rest were asleep. It was in the shadiest corner of this doorway that the man had placed

himself, and yet he could see the full, nearly-rounded orb without coming under her beams. As so often happens, two processes seemed going on in his mind at once; one suggested by objects present, and finding utterance in an occasional murmured sentence or two, the other originating in things past, and proceeding silently.

"Ay, Madam Moon," he said; "you are a curious creature, with your changes and your risings; and your settings, and your man with his dog and lantern. I wonder what you really are. You look like a great big ducat nailed upon the sky, or a seal of yellow wax pendent from the charter of the heavens. I could almost fancy, though, that I can see behind you on this clear night. Perhaps you are but the big boss of a sconce, put up there to reflect the light of the sun. You will soon be up there, just above the watch-tower of the castle, like a ball upon a gate-post. Hark! there are people riding late. By my faith! if they be travellers coming hither, they will find scanty lodging and little to eat. These gormandizing Frenchmen

have gobbled up everything in the village, I warrant, and occupied every bed. On my faith, they will find themselves too confident some day: not a sentry set except at the stables; no one on guard; the two or three officers in the dining-hall. They think they have got Italy at their feet; they may discover that they are mistaken before they leave it. These horsemen are coming hither. Who can they be?"

While these thoughts had been occupying one part of the man—I know not how better to express it—and had more or less clothed themselves in words, another train, more nearly allied to feeling, had been proceeding silently in the deeper recesses of his bosom. There was something which made him half sorry that he had been prevented from proceeding further before nightfall, half angry with him who had been, partly at least, the cause of the delay. "I do not believe," he thought, "that the big bravo can reach the villa before morning. He had not set out when we came away, and yet I should

like to see the young lord to-night. I have a great mind to get upon my horse's skin at once and go on. But then, a thousand to one, De Vitry would send after and stop me; and if I were to meet Buondoni and his people, I should get my throat cut, and all my news would escape through the gash. If I could persuade this dashing French captain to lend me half a dozen men now, I might do something; but their horses are all tired with carrying the 'cart-load of iron each has got upon his shoulders. Hark! these travellers are coming nearer. Perhaps they may bring some news from the Villa Rovera. They are coming from that side."

He drew farther back into the shadow of the gateway. It may seem strange that he did so; for even in distracted England, in those days as well as afterward, the first impulse of the lodger in an inn was to meet the coming guest and obtain the general tidings which he brought, and which were hardly to be obtained from any other source. But in Italy men had learned such caution that every stranger was considered an enemy

till he was ascertained to be a friend. The evils of high civilisation were upon the land, without any of its benefits; nay, more, this had endured so long that suspicion might almost be looked upon as the normal condition of the Italian mind.

The republics of Italy have been highly extolled by eloquent men, but their results were all evil except in one respect. They served to preserve a memory of the arts—to rescue, in fact, something which might decorate life from the wreck of perished years. In thus speaking, I include commerce with the arts. But as to social advancement, they did nothing except through the instrumentality of those arts. They endeavoured to revive ancient forms unsuited to the epoch; they succeeded in so doing only for the briefest possible period, and the effort ended everywhere, first in anarchy, and then in despotism—each equally destructive to individual happiness, to general security, and to public morals. They afforded a spectacle, at once humiliating and terrible, of the impotence of the human mind

to stem the strong, calm current of pre-ordained events. Their brief existence, their lamentable failure, the brightness of their short course, and the evils consequent upon the attempts to recall rotten institutions from millennial graves, were but as the last flash of the expiring candle of old Rome, ending in darkness and a bad smell. For more than two centuries, at the time I speak of, life and property in Italy had enjoyed no security except in the continual watchfulness of the possessor. The minds of men were armed as well as their bodies, and thus had been engendered that suspicion and that constant watchfulness which rendered life a mere campaign, because the world was one battle field.

Oh! happy state under the old Saxon King of England, when from one end to the other of the bright island a young girl might carry a purse of gold unmolested!

Antonio drew back as the travellers approached to hear something of who and what they were before he ventured to deal with them personally. They were within a few yards of him in a

minute, drawing in the rein when they came opposite the archway leading to the stable-yard. There the first challenge of a sentinel was heard, and the answer given, "Amici!" showed that they were Italians.

The word was uttered quickly and in a tone of surprise, which showed they were unaware the borgo had been occupied by the French troops; but, after a few whispered sentences, one of the four who had newly arrived asked the sentinel, in marvellous bad French, to call the landlord or one of the horse-boys. They wanted food for themselves and horses, they said, and hoped to find some place to rest in for the night.

The sentinel grumbled forth something to the effect that they were much mistaken, but, raising his stentorian voice, he called the people of the house into the courtyard; and Antonio gazed forth and scrutinised the appearance of the newcomers for a minute or two, while they made their application for entertainment, and heard all the objections and difficulties laid before them by the landlord, who was already overcrowded, but un-

willing to lose certain *lire* which they might expend in his house.

"I can but feed your horses in the yard, and give you some straw and covering for yourselves Signor Sacchi," replied the landlord; "and then you must lie on the floor of the hall."

The leading horseman turned to consult with his three companions, saying, "He told us to wait him here if he came not in an hour."

"Nay, I understood, if he came not in an hour," replied another, "we were to conclude he had obtained entertainment in the Villa —, which the count's letter was sure to secure for him; but I did not hear him say we were to come back here, as I told you long ago, Sacchi."

But before they had proceeded even thus far, Antonio had re-entered the house, and was conversing eagerly with the young Marquis de Vitry.

"If you will but let me have half a dozen common troopers, my lord," said he—"I know not how many this man may have with him, but I will risk that."

"But who is he? who is he?" asked De Vitry, "and what are your causes of suspicion?"

"Why I told you, my lord," replied Antonio, "he is that tall, big-limbed Ferrara man who is so great a favourite with the Count Regent—Buondoni is his name. Then, as to the causes of suspicion, I came upon Ludovic and him talking in the gallery of the castle last night, and I heard the count say, 'Put him out of the way any how; he is a viper in my path, and must be removed. Surely, Buondoni, you can pick a quarrel with the young hound, and rid me of him. He is not a very fearful enemy, I think, to a master of fence like you!' Thereupon the other laughed, saying, 'Well, my lord, I will set out to-night or to-morrow, and you shall hear of something being done before Thursday, unless Signor Rovera takes good care of his young kinsman.' 'Let him beware how he crosses me,' muttered the Moor. And now, Signor de Vitry, I am anxious to warn my young lord of what is plotting against him."

"After all, it may be against another, a dif-

ferent person from him you suppose," replied De Vitry. "This Buondoni, if it be the same man, was insolent to young De Terrail, and Bayard struck him. We also were going to halt at the Villa Rovera, and Ludovic knew it."

"But, my lord," exclaimed Antonio, "do you not perceive—"

"I see, I see," replied De Vitry, interrupting him: "I know what you would say. Ludovic has no cause to hate Bayard or to remove him; it was but Buondoni's private quarrel. There is some truth in that. Are you sure these men just arrived are his servants?"

"As sure as the sun moves round the earth," replied Antonio.

"Nay, that I know naught of," answered De Vitry; "but here they come, I suppose. Find out De Terrail, Antonio. Tell him to take twenty men of his troop and go forward with you. You can tell him your errand as you go. I will deal awhile with these gentlemen, and see what I can make out of them."

Antonio retired quietly, keeping to the shady

side of the large ill-lighted hall, while the three freshly-arrived travellers moved slowly forward, with a respectful air, toward the table near which De Vitry sat.

"Give you good evening, gentlemen," said the marquis, turning sharply round as soon as he heard their footsteps near. "Whence come you?"

"From Pavia, my lord," said Sacchi, a large-boned, black-bearded man.

"And what news bring you?" inquired the French commander.

"None, my lord," replied the man; "all was marvellous peaceful."

"Ay, peace is a marvel in this wicked world," answered De Vitry. "Called you at the Villa Rovera as you passed?"

"No, sir—that is, we stopped a moment, but did not call," replied Sacchi.

"And what did you stop for?" asked the Frenchman.

"Only just to—to be sure of our way," replied Sacchi."

"And you came from Pavia, then?" said De Vitry. "You must have set out at a late hour, especially for men who did not rightly know their way. But methinks I saw you in Milan this morning. Will you have the bounty to wake that gentleman at the end of the table, who has gone to sleep over his wine?"

He spoke in the calmest and most good-humoured tone, without moving in his seat, his feet stretched out before him, and his head thrown back; and the man to whom he spoke approached the French officer who was seated sleeping at the table, and took him by the shoulder.

"Shake him," said De Vitry; "shake him hard; he sleeps soundly when he does sleep."

Sacchi did as he was bid, and the officer started up, exclaiming:

"What is it? Aux armes!"

"No need of arms, Montcour," answered his commander; "only do me the favor of taking that gentleman by the collar, and placing him in arrest."

He spoke at first slowly, but increased in rapidity of utterance as he saw his officer's sleepy senses begin to awaken. But Montcour was hardly enough roused to execute his orders, and though he stretched out his hand somewhat quickly toward Sacchi's neck, the Italian had time to jump back and make toward the door.

De Vitry was on his feet in a moment, however, and barred the way, sword in hand. The other servants of Buondoni rushed to the only other way out; but there were officers of De Vitry's band not quite so sleepy as Montcour, and, without waiting for orders, they soon made three out of the four prisoners. The other leaped from the window and escaped.

"My lord, my lord, this is too bad!" exclaimed Sacchi; "you came here as friends and allies of the noble Regent, and you are hardly ten days in the country before you begin to abuse his subjects and servants."

For a moment or two De Vitry kept silence, and gazed at his prisoner with a look of contempt. The man did not like either the look or

the silence. Each was significant, but difficult to answer; and in a moment after, De Vitry having given him over to one of the subaltern officers, nodded his head, quietly saying:

"We understand you, sirrah, better than you think. If I were to consider you really as a servant of Prince Ludovic, I might remark that the regent invited us here as friends and allies, and we had been scarcely ten days in the land ere he sent you and others to murder one of our officers, and a kinsman of our king; but I do not choose to consider you as his servant, nor to believe that he is responsible for your acts. The king must judge of that as he finds reason, and either hang you or your master, as in his equity, he judges right. As to other matters, you know your first word was a lie, that you do not come from Pavia at all, and that the beginning and end of your journey was the Villa Rovera. What you have done there I do not know, but I know the object of your master."

"But sir, I have nought to do with my master's business," replied Sacchi. "I know naught

of his objects; I only know that I obey my orders."

"Hark ye! we are wasting words," said De Vitry. "Doubtless you will be glad to know what I intend to do with you. I shall keep you here till an hour before daybreak, and then take you on to the villa. If I find that one hair of Lorenzo Visconti's head has suffered, I will first hang your master, the worshipful Signor Buondoni, on the nearest tree, and then hang you three round him for the sake of symmetry. I swear it on the cross;" and he devoutly kissed the hilt of his sword.

Sacchi's face turned deadly pale, and he murmured:

"It will be too late—to-morrow—before to-morrow it will be done."

"What is that you mutter?" said De Vitry; "what do you mean will be done?"

"Why, my lord," replied the man, "my master—my master may have some grudge against the young lord Lorenzo. He is a man of quick action, and does not tarry long in his work. I

know naught about it, so help me Heaven! but it is hard to put an innocent man's life in jeopardy for what may happen in a night. Better set off at once and stop the mischief rather than avenge it."

"So, so!" said De Vitry; "then the story is all too true. Bayard! Bayard!"

"He has just passed into the court, seigneur," replied one of the young officers who was standing near the window; "he and some others are mounting their horses now. Shall I call him?"

"No, let him go," answered the leader; "he is always prompt and always wise. We can trust it all to him. As for these fellows, take them and put them in an upper room where they cannot jump out. Set a guard at the door. You, signors, best know whether your consciences are quite clear; but if they be not, I advise you to make your peace with Heaven as best you may during the night, for I strongly suspect, from what you yourselves admit, that I shall have to raise you a little above earthly things about

dawn to-morrow. There, take them away. I do not want to hear any more. Our good King Louis, eleventh of the name, had a way of decorating trees after such a sort. I have seen as many as a dozen all pendant at once when I was a young boy, and I do not know why it should go against my stomach to do this same with a pack of murderous wolves, who seem made by Heaven for the purpose of giving a warning to their countrymen."

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Lorenzo awoke—and his sleep was not of such long duration as fully to outlive the darkness—he found more than one person watching him. Close by his side sat Ramiro d'Orco, and near the foot of his bed the lamplight fell upon the well-known face of his faithful follower, Antonio. He felt faint and somewhat confused, and he had a throbbing of the brow and temples, which told him he was ill; but for some moments he remembered nothing of the events which had taken place the night before.

“How feel you, my young friend?” asked Ramiro, in a far more gracious tone than he commonly used; “yet speak low and carefully,

for, though the antidote has overwrought the poison, you must long be watchful of your health, and make no exertion."

"You are very kind, Signor Ramiro," replied the young man. "I believe I was wounded last night, and that the blade was poisoned—yes, it was so, and I owe you my life."

"I speak not of that, Lorenzo," replied Ramiro; "I am right glad I was here, and could wish much that I could remain to watch you in your convalescence, for a relapse might be fatal; but I will trust you to hands more delicate, if not so skilful as my own. Men make bad nurses; women are the fit attendants for a sick room, and your pretty little cousin, Bianca Maria—as gentle and sweet as an angel—and my child Leonora, whom you know, shall be your companions. I will charge them both to watch you at all moments, and, under their tender care, I warrant you will soon recover. I myself must ride hence ere noon, for I must be in Rome ere ten days are over. Ere that you will be quite well; and should it be needful that

Leonora should follow me, I will trust to your noble care to bring her on through this distracted country. I know you will reverence her youth and innocence for her father's sake, who has done all he could for you in a moment of great peril."

Lorenzo's heart beat with joy at the mere thought. I would have said thrilled, but, unhappily, the misuse of good words by vulgar and ignorant men banishes them, in process of time, from the dictionary. The multitude is too strong for individual worth, and prevails.

"On my honor and my soul," replied Lorenzo, "I will guard her with all veneration and love, as if she were some sacred shrine committed to my charge."

A slight irrepressible sneer curled Ramiro's lip, for all enthusiasms are contemptible to worldly men; but he was well learned in fine words and phrases, and had sentiments enough by rote.

"The mind of a pure girl," he said, "is indeed as a saint in a shrine. Woe be to him who desecrates

it. We are accustomed to think of such things too lightly in this land; but you have had foreign education amongst the chivalrous lords of France, in whom honour is an instinct, and I will fearlessly trust you to guard her on her journey through the troubled country across which she will have to pass."

"You may do so confidently, signor," replied Lorenzo, in a bold tone; but then he seemed to hesitate; and raising himself on his arm, after a moment's thought, he added, "I hope, my lord, you will not consider that I violate the trust reposed in me, if perchance I should, in all honor, plead my cause with her by the way. Already I love her with an honourable and yet a passionate love, and I must win her for my wife if she is to be won. We are both very young, it is too true; but that only gives me the more time to gain her, if you do not oppose. As for myself, I know I shall never change, and I would lose neither time nor opportunity in wooing her affections in return. I fear me, indeed," he added, "that I could not resist the occasion,

were she to go forward under my guard, and therefore I speak so plainly thus early."

He paused a moment, and then continued, with an instinctive appreciation of the character of him to whom he spoke, which all Ramiro's apparent disinterested kindness had not been able to affect:

"What dower she may have, I know not, neither do I care. I have enough for both, and allied as I am to more than one royal house, were I ambitious—and for her sake I may become so—I could carve me a path which would open out to me and mine high honours and advantages, unless I be a coward or a fool."

"Well, well, good youth, we will talk more of this another time," replied Ramiro d'Orco; "you have done nobly and honestly to speak of it, and it will only make me trust you more implicitly. Coward you are none, as you have shown this night, and fool you certainly are not. You may want the guidance of some experience, and if you be willing to listen to the counsel of one who has seen more of life than you, I will show

you how to turn your great advantages to good account. It might not be too vast a scope of fancy to think of a Visconti once more seated in the chair of Milan. But I have news for you, one of your comrades in arms has arrived during the night, warned, it would seem, that some harm was intended you."

"Who is he?" asked Lorenzo eagerly.

"Young Pierre de Terrail," answered Ramiro. "He seems a noble youth, and was much grieved to hear that you were suffering. He has brought some twenty men with him, whom we have lodged commodiously; but I would not suffer him to come up while you were sleeping, as undisturbed repose was most necessary to your recovery."

Lorenzo expressed a strong wish to see his young comrade; and in a few minutes he, so celebrated afterwards as the Chevalier Bayard, was introduced. He was at this time a youth of about eighteen years of age, who at first sight appeared but slightly made, and formed more for activity than strength. Closer observation,

however, showed in the broad shoulders and open chest, the thin flank, and long, powerful limbs, the promise of that hardy vigor which he afterwards displayed.

Lorenzo held out his hand to him with a warm smile, saying, "Welcome, welcome, De Terrail! You find me here fit for nothing, while there you are still in your armour, as a reproach to me, I suppose, for not being ready to march."

"Not so, not so, Visconti," said the young hero. "I did not know how soon you might wake, or how soon I might have occasion to go on to Pavia, and therefore I sat me down and slept in my armour, like a lobster in his shell. But how feel you now? Is the venom wholly subdued?"

"Yes, thanks to this noble lord," replied Lorenzo.

"Nevertheless," rejoined Ramiro, "you will need several days' repose before you can venture to mount your horse. Any agitation of the blood might prove fatal."

"Why, he has just been named by the king to the command of a troop in our band," answered De Terrail; "but we must manage that for you, Visconti. We will take it turn and turn about to order your company for you till you are well."

"Nay, I do not intend to have that troop," replied his young friend. "It is yours of right, Terrail. You entered full three months before me; and I will not consent to be put over your head."

"I will have none of it," answered the young Bayard. "It is the king's own will, Visconti; and we must obey without grumbling. Besides, do you think I will rob a man of his post while he is suffering on my account?"

"How am I suffering on your account?" asked Visconti. "What had you to do with my wound?"

"Do you not know that I struck this big fellow in the castle court at Milan because he was insolent?" said Bayard. "He vowed he would kill me before the week was out, and, depend

upon it, he mistook you for me. He knew I was coming hither, and thought I was coming alone; for at first the king ordered me to carry you the news of your nomination, but he afterward changed his mind, and sent it by the trumpet who was going to Pavia. He might not have killed me as easily as he thought; but he met a still worse playfellow in you, for you killed him instead. You were always exceedingly skilful with rapier and dagger, though I think I am your equal with the lance."

"Oh! superior far," answered Lorenzo. "So he is dead, is he? I have but a confused notion of all that took place last night. I only know that he attacked me like a wild beast, and I had not even time to draw my dagger."

"Ay! dead enough," replied De Terrail. "I had a look at him as he lies below in the hall, and a more fell visage I never saw on a corpse. Your sword went clear through him, from the right side to the left; and you only gave him what he well merited—the murderous scoundrel, to poison his weapons!"

"That is a practice which sometimes must be had resort to, when men serve great princes," observed Ramiro, with a quiet smile, "but in a private quarrel it is base."

"Ay, base enough any way," replied the young Bayard. "However, you have rid me of an enemy and the world of an assassin, Lorenzo, and I hope you will not suffer long. But there, the day is coming up in the east, and I must on to Pavia presently. I had orders last night to ride early this morning and mark out our quarters; but when your good fellow there gave us news of your danger, I came on, by De Vitry's order, to see if we could defend you."

"If you will wait but half an hour, and break your fast with us in the hall," said Ramiro d'Orco, "I will ride on with you, and take advantage of the escort of your men-at-arms, Signor de Terrail."

"Willingly," answered the other; "some breakfast were no bad thing; for, good faith! we supped lightly last night. But I will go and

see that all is ready for departure when we have done our meal."

He quitted the room, and Ramira d'Orco soon after followed, promising to see his patient again before he departed for the South.

Left alone with his young lord, Antonio drew nearer, and, bending down his head, said, "I wonder, signor, what charm you have used upon the Signor d'Orco to make his hard iron as soft as soap. Why, he is the picture of tenderness—Mercy weeping over the guilt of sinners—a lineal descendant from the good Samaritan, or of that gentleman from whom the Frangipani are descended, or some other of the charitable heroes of antiquity. He was never known to shed a tear that was not produced by something that tickled his nose, or to laugh except when he saw the grimaces of a man broken on the wheel."

"Hush, hush!" said Lorenzo; "to me he has been very kind, and I must judge of people as I find them."

"Ay, sir, judge when you know them well,"

answered Antonio. "Your pardon, excellent lord; but hear a word or two more. He who was more than a father to you, placed me near you to serve you, not only with my limbs, but with my tongue—in the way of counsel, I mean. This man has benefited you. Be grateful to him; but be not the less on your guard. Give him no power over you, lest he should abuse it. The smallest secret in the keeping of a wicked man is a sword over the head of him who trusted him. If we lock up our own money, how much more should we lock up our thoughts. I have seen a mountebank's pig walk upon his hind legs; but I never saw one that could do it long at a time. If you wait and watch, cunning will always show itself in its true colors. The face of a man's nature is always too big for any mask he can buy, and some feature will always be uncovered by which you can know the man. No one can cover his whole person with a veil; and if you cannot judge by the face, you can find him out by the feet."

"Well, well," said Lorenzo, somewhat impa-

tiently; "open that window wide, Antonio. My head aches, and I feel half suffocated. Then just smooth my bed, and put out that winking lamp. I should not have my chamber look like the room of an hospital."

Quick to comprehend, Antonio did not only what Lorenzo ordered, but much more, and set himself busily to give an air of trim neatness to the apartment, removing his master's bloody clothing which was lying on the ground, and placing on a stool clean linen and a new suit, but taking care to move neither the sword nor the arms, which had been cast negligently on the table. There was something picturesque in their arrangement that suited his fancy, and he let them remain, But in the course of his perquisitions he came to the silver flagon which had been brought by the page, and, after smelling to it, he asked, "Why, what is this?"

"Nay, I only know that it kept up my strength when I felt as if each moment I should die," answered Lorenzo. "I do not think even the antidote he applied to my arm would have been

sufficient to save me but for its aid; the poison was so potent."

"Doubtless," replied Antonio; "but it gives me a secret how to accelerate your cure, my good lord.—A wet napkin round his head will take off the head-ache, at all events," he muttered to himself; "but not just yet. Better let these men depart first."

"Now, Antonio, sit down and tell me all that has befallen since I sent you to Milan," said Lorenzo. "Did you find the small picture of my mother where old Beatrice told me it would be found?"

"Yes, my lord; but the case was much broken," replied Antonio. "Here it is."

As he spoke, he produced one of those miniature portraits which sometimes even the most celebrated artists of the day were pleased to paint, and handed it to Lorenzo. It was fixed in an embossed case of gilded brass; but as the man had said, the back of the case had been apparently forced sharply open, so as to break the springlock and one of the hinges.

Lorenzo took it, and, raising himself on his elbow, gazed at the features of a very lovely woman which the picture represented.

"And this was my mother!" he murmured, after looking at it for a long time; and then he added, in a still lower tone, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!"

He then turned the portrait, drew off the dilapidated back of the case, and read some words which were written round a small oval box forming part of the frame, but concealed by the case when it was closed.

"A cure for the ills of life!" were the words; and, lifting the lid of the box, he beheld several small papers, containing some substance within them, discolored by age.

"Know you what these are?" he asked of Antonio.

"No, my lord," replied the man; "poison, I suppose, as death is 'the only cure for all the ills of life.'"

"Right!" replied Lorenzo, musing, "right! He told me she had only escaped dishonour by death."

"Ay, my good young lord, I can tell you more of it," answered Antonio. "You were a baby then; but I am well-nigh fifteen years older, and I remember it all right well. I was then in Milan, and—"

He had not time to finish the sentence ere Ramira D'Orco entered the room, followed by Bianca Maria and Leonora. The expression of the countenance of each of the two girls was somewhat significant of their characters. Blanche Marie gazed, shrinking and timid, round the room, as if she expected to behold some ghastly spectacle, till her eyes lighted upon Lorenzo, and then a glad smile spread over her whole face. Leonora looked straight on, her eyes fixing upon her wounded lover at once, as if divining rather than seeing where he lay; and, walking straight to his bedside, she took the chair nearest, as if of right.

"I have brought you two nurses, Lorenzo," said Ramiro; "they will give their whole care to you, and you will soon be well. But you must promise me, in honor of the skill which has saved

your life, that you will not hazard it by attempting any exercise for several days."

"I will not," answered Lorenzo, "unless the king's orders especially require my service. Of course, if they do, his orders must be obeyed."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the other; "but those orders will not come. He shall hear how near death you have been, and of course will be considerate. But now farewell. I must go join Monsieur de Terrail. You shall hear from me, when I reach Bologna, concerning what was spoken of. Till then, I leave you in kind and tender hands."

Thus saying, he bade him adieu and left him; and Antonio followed, judging perhaps that Lorenzo's two fair companions would afford attendance enough.

CHAPTER X.

"WHO Times gallops withal!" Alas! dear Rosalind, you might have found a sweeter illustration than that which you give. Doubtless "he gallops with a thief to the gallows," but, I fear me, impatient joy and reluctant fear, like most opposites in the circle of all things, meet and blend into each other. Time gallops full as fast when he carries along two lovers, and between the hours of meeting and parting his pace is certainly of the quickest.

Never, perhaps, did he travel so fast as with Leonora and Lorenzo. Their feelings were so new; they were so eager and so warm; they were so full of youth and youth's impetuous

fire, that—smouldering as love had been for the last ten days, unseen even by their own eyes, and only lighted into a blaze by the events of the night before—we might pursue the image of a great conflagration, and say, both were confused and dazzled by the light, and hardly felt or knew the rapid passing of the quick-winged moments.

Blanche Marie might perhaps have estimated the passage of time more justly; for the unhappy third person—however he may love the two others, and whatever interest he may feel in their happiness—has, after all, but a sorry and a tedious part to play; and, although the fairer and the milder of the two girls was not yet more than fourteen, she might long—while she sat there, silent, and striving not to listen to the murmured words of the two lovers—she might long for the day when her happy hour would come, and when the whole heart's treasury would be opened for her to pick out its brightest gems. Nay, perhaps I might go even a little farther, and remind the reader that life's earlier stage

is shorter in Italy than in most other European countries; that the olive and the orange ripen fast; and that the fruits of the heart soon reach maturity in that land. Juliet—all Italian, impassioned Juliet—was not yet fourteen—not till “Lammas Eve”—when the consuming fire took possession of her heart, and Lady Capulet herself was a mother almost at the years of Blanche Marie.

But it is an hour—that at which she had now arrived in life's short day—it is an hour of dreams and fairy forms, in the faint, vapory twilight which lies between the dawn and the full day, when the rising sun paints every mist with gold and rose-color, and through the very air of young existence spreads a purple light. The tears of that sweet time are but as early dew-drops brightened into jewels by the light of youthful hope, and the onward look of coming years, though kindled with the first beams of passion, knows not the fiery heat of noon, nor can conceive the arid dryness of satiety.

Blanche Marie sat and dreamed near her two

cousins. At first, she heard some of the words they spoke; but then she listened more to the speakers in her own heart; and then she gave herself up to visions of the future; and the outward creature remained but a fair, motionless statue, unconscious of aught that passed around her, but full of light and ever-varying fancies.

How passed the time none of the three knew, but it passed rapidly, and Bianca was awakened from her reveries by the sound of a strange voice, saying, "Pardon, sweet lady," as some one passed her, brushing lightly against her garments, which he could not avoid touching, on his way to Lorenzo's bedside.

"Why, how now, Visconti!" exclaimed the new-comer. "What! made a leader, assaulted by an assassin, wounded with a poisoned weapon, vanquisher in the fight, saved by a miracle, and nursed by two beautiful ladies—all in twenty-four hours! By my fay, thou art a favored child of chivalry indeed!"

Blanche Marie looked round at the speaker, roused from her reverie suddenly but not unpleas-

antly. There was something joyous, light-hearted, and musical in the voice that spoke, which won favor by its very tone. Oh! there is a magic in the voice, of which we take not account enough. Have you not often marked, reader, how one man in a mixed company will win attention in an instant, not by the matter of his words, not by the manner, but by the mere tone in which they are spoken? Have you not sometimes seen two men striving to gain the ear of a fair lady, and eloquence, and sense, and wit all fail, while sweet tones only have prevailed? The eye and the ear are but sentries on guard, and the fair form and the sweet tone are but as passwords to the camp. Nay, more: some voices have their peculiar harmonies with the hearts of individuals. One will have no sweetness in its tone to many, while to another it will be all melody; and all this is no strange phenomenon; it is quite natural that it should be so. Where is the man to whom the owl is as sweet a songster as the lark? and who can pass the nightingale on his spray, though he may not pause a

moment by the gaudy paroquet? The blackbird's sweet, round pipe, the thrush's evening welcome to the approaching spring, the lark's rejoicing fugue in the blue sky, are all sweet to well-tuned ears; but each finds readier access to some hearts than to others.

The voice which awoke Bianca Maria from her reverie was very pleasant to her ear. There was an unaffected frankness in it—as if welling up clear from the heart—which was prepossessing to a pure, young, innocent mind like hers.

“Ah! Signor De Vitry,” replied Lorenzo, “I have, indeed, had good fortune in many ways; and I suppose I ought in common gratitude to Heaven, to think it all unmixed good. But I have somewhat suffered in body, and now I am troubled to think what is to become of my troop while I lie here useless. I would the king would bestow it upon De Terrail, and let me have another chance.”

“Think not of it,” answered De Vitry; “we will arrange all things for you. Bayard is a noble fellow, who will win high fame some day,

but we must obey the king. I find De Terrail has been here, and suppose you have seen him, for they tell me he went on two hours ago."

"Two hours!" exclaimed Lorenzo; "hardly so much I think."

"Ay! time flies fast under bright eyes," answered De Vitry, with a laugh. "Two hours the servants below tell me, and no less. However, I must on my way. I only stopped to enquire what had happened, for no news had reached me when I marched; and I found a prisoner below whom Bayard left for me—a man who waited without, it seems, while Monsieur Buondoni busied himself with you within. I had three others of the villains in my power before, but they do not seem to be as deep in their master's secrets as this gentleman. But my provost must have finished the work I gave him by this time, and so I must on. Your pardon, sweet young lady, will you give me leave just to look forth from this window?"

He passed Blanche Marie with a courteous inclination of the head, and gazed forth toward

the high road, and then, turning to Lorenzo, added:

"Ay, it is all right. Farewell for the present, Visconti. Rest quietly till you are quite well. We shall halt at Pavia for two or three days till the king comes on, and then probably for some days more. But I will come and see you from time to time, and we will make all needful arrangements. Shall I be welcome, sweet lady?"

"Oh, right welcome, noble, sir," replied Bianca Maria, to whom his words were addressed; "but you must not go without tasting some refreshment, and you must see the Count Rovera, my grandsire."

"Nay, I have but little time," answered De Vitry; "and yet a cup of wine from such fair hands were mightily refreshing after a dusty ride. Your grandsire I will see when I am in a more fitting attire. 'Tis but six miles to Pavia, I am told; and I will soon ride over again, were it but to make excuse to the old count for hanging an assassin just before his gates. However, it may

chance to warn others of the same cloth to venture here no more."

Bianca Maria's cheek turned somewhat pale, and she suddenly turned her eyes in the direction toward which De Vitry had been looking from the window a moment or two before. There was a dark object hanging among the bare branches of a mulberry tree long divested of its leaves. She could not exactly distinguish what that object was, but she divined; and turning away with a shudder, she murmured:

"For Heaven's sake my lord, have him cut down."

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied De Vitry; "but, dear lady, it is needful to punish such villains, or we should soon have but few of our French nobles, or those who hold with us, left alive. However, there can be no great harm in cutting him down now, for my provost does not do any such things by halves."

He took a step toward the door, and then

paused for a moment, as if not quite certain of the fair young girl's wishes.

"You know, I suppose," he said, in a tone of an enquiry, "that this man whom they have just hanged, is one of those who came to assassinate Signor Visconti here?"

"My cousin has avenged himself in defending himself," answered Bianca Maria. "I am sure he does not wish any others to suffer."

"Well," answered De Vitry with a laugh; "I thought myself mightily compassionate that I did not hang the other three, as, I dare say, they all well deserved; but this fellow was caught waiting for Buondoni, and was, we found, in the whole secret. However, we will have him cut down, if such be your pleasure."

"Oh, pray do, my lord—pray do, at once!" cried Bianca; "perhaps there may be life in him yet."

"Now Heaven forbid!" cried De Vitry; "but come with me, sweet lady, and you shall hear the order given instantly. Adieu, Visconti! Fare

well, beautiful lady with the dark eyes! You have not bestowed one word upon me; but, nevertheless, I kiss your hand."

Thus saying, he left the room with Blanche Marie, who led him by a staircase somewhat distant from that which conducted to the great hall, where the body of Buondoni still lay, to a vestibule, where several of the marquis's attendants were waiting. There the orders which De Vitry had promised, were soon given, and a cup of wine was brought for his refreshment. He lingered over it for a longer space of time than he had intended, and while he did so, he contrived to wile Bianca Maria's thoughts away from the event that had saddened them. Indeed, though the young girl was less light and volatile than she seemed to be, and many of her age really were, he effected his object—if it was an object—far more readily than could have been supposed. There was something in his manner toward her which amused and yet teased her, which pleased but did not frighten her. There was a certain touch of gallantry in it, and evi-

dently no small portion of admiration; and yet it was clear he looked upon her as a child, and that in all his civil speeches there was at least as much jest as earnest. Nevertheless, every now and then there was a serious tone which fell pleasantly upon the young girl's ear, and was thought of in after hours.

"I trust the count will soon be here," she said, at length; "you had better stay, Signor de Vitry, and see him. He sat up during the greater part of the night, I am told, anxious about my cousin. But he must rise soon."

"My sweet lady," answered the soldier, "I must not stay. I have two—nay, three good reasons for going: first, that a beautiful young lady has already beguiled me to stay longer than I should; secondly, that a pleasant old gentleman might beguile me to stay still longer; and, thirdly, that, as I intend to come back again often, I must husband excuses for my visits, and one shall be to see the count, and to apologize in person for acting high justiciary upon his lands. You have forgiven me already, I think,

else there is no truth in those blue eyes; and so I kiss your hand, and promise to behave better when next I come."

Blanche Marie had ample matter for meditation during the rest of that day, at least.

CHAPTER XI.

IN those days, as in the present, there was situated, somewhere or other in the garden, farm, or podere of every Italian villa, sometimes hid among the fig-trees, olives, or mulberries, sometimes planted close to one of the gates of the inclosing walls, a neat farm-house, the abode of the contadino, who dwelt there usually in much more happiness and security than attended his lords and masters in their more magnificent abodes. It is true that occasionally a little violence might be brought down upon the heads of the family, by any extraordinary beauty in a daughter or a niece, or any very ferocious virtue upon the parents' part; but sooth to say,

I fear me much that, since the times of Virginius, Italian fathers have not looked with very severe eyes upon affairs of gallantry between their daughters and men of elevated station, nor have the young ladies themselves been very scrupulous in accepting the attentions of well-born cavaliers. The inconveniences resulting from such adventures apart, the life of an Italian peasant was far more safe and far more happy in those days than the life of a noble or a citizen, and Sismondi has justly pointed out that they were more contented with their lot, and had more cause for content, than any other class in the land. No very heavy exactions pressed upon them; their lords were generally just, and even generous; and it rarely happened that they saw their harvests wasted even by the wandering bands, whose leaders wisely remembered that they and their soldiers must depend upon those harvests for support.

The house of a contadino has less changed than almost any other building in Italy. There was always a certain degree of taste displayed

in its construction, and there was always one room a good deal larger than any of the rest, with plenty of air blowing through it, to which, when the sun shone too strongly under the porch, any of the family could retire *per pigliar la fresca*. It was in this large room at the farm, in the gardens of the villa that, at an early hour of the day which succeeded the death of Buondoni, a strange sight might be seen. The door was locked and barred, and from time to time each of those within—and there were several—turned a somewhat anxious, fearful look towards it or to the windows, as if they were engaged in some act for which they desired no witnesses. Two women, an old and a young one, stood at the head of a long table; a second girl was seen at the side; a young man was near the other end, holding a large, heavy bucket in his hand; and at some distance from all the rest, with his arms folded on his chest and somewhat gloomy disapproving brow, was the contadino himself, gazing at what the others were about, but taking no part therein himself.

The object, however, of most interest lay upon the table. It was apparently the corpse of a man from thirty-five to forty years of age, dressed in the garb of a retainer of some noble house. His long black hair flowed wildly from his head, partly soiled with dust, partly steeped with water. His dress also was wet, and the collar of his coat as well as that of his vest seemed to have been torn rudely open. He had apparently died a violent death: the face was of a dark waxen yellow, and the tongue, which protuded from the mouth, had been bitten in violent agony between the teeth. Round his neck, and extending upwards towards the left ear, was a dark red mark, significant of the manner of his death.

"Here, Giulio, here!" cried the elder woman, "pour the water over him again. His eyes roll in his head. He is coming to!"

"Ah, Marie! what a face he makes," exclaimed one of the girls, shutting out the sight with her hands.

"Poor fools! you will do more harm than

good," murmured the contadino; "let the man pass in peace! I would sooner spend twenty lire in masses for his soul than bring him back to trouble the world any more."

"Would you have us act like tigers or devils, you old iniquity?" asked his wife, shaking three fingers at him. "The life is in the poor man yet. Shall we let him go out of the world without unction or confession, for fear of what these French heretics may do to us?"

"Besides, Madonna Bianca had him cut down to save his life," cried the girl who stood nearest his head. "You would fain please her, I trow, father. I heard her myself pray for him to be cut down, and she will be glad to hear we have recovered him. It was that which made me run away for Giulio as soon as the order was given."

While this dialogue was going on, the young man, Giulio, had poured the whole bucket of water over the recumbent body on the table, dashing it on with a force which might well have driven the soul out of a living man, but which, on this occasion, seemed to have the very opposite

effect of bringing spirit into a dead one. Suddenly the eyelids closed over the staring eyes; there was a shudder passed over the whole frame; the fingers seemed to grasp at some fancied object on the table, and at length respiration returned, at first in fitful gasps, but soon with regular and even quiet action. The eyes then opened again, and turned from face to face with some degree of consciousness; but they closed again after a momentary glance around, and he fell into what seemed a heavy sleep, distinguished from that still heavier sleep into which he had lately lain by the equable heaving of the chest.

The mother and the two girls looked on rejoicing, and Giulio, too, had a well-satisfied look, for such are the powers of that wonderful quality called vanity, that as it was under his hand the man recovered, he attributed his resuscitation entirely to his own skill; and had his patient been the devil himself come to plague him and all the world, good Giulio would have glorified himself upon the triumph of his exertions. And well he

might; for, unfortunately, as this world goes, men glory as much over their success in bad as in good actions, judging not the merit of deeds by their consequences, even where those consequences are self-evident. Success, success is all that the world esteems. It is the gold that will not tarnish—the diamond whose lustre no breath can dim.

The old contadino, however, was even less pleased with the result of his family's efforts than he had been with the efforts themselves.

"Satan will owe us something," he muttered, "for snatching from him one of his own, and he is a gentleman who always pays his debts. By my faith, I will go up and tell the count what has chanced. I do not choose to be blamed for these women's mad folly. Better let him know at once, while the fellow is in such a state that a pillow over his mouth will soon put out the lighted flame they have lighted in him—if my lord pleases."

"What are you murmuring there, you old hyena?" asked his gentle wife.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, good dame," replied the husband; "'twas only the fellow's grimaces made me sick, and I must out into the podere. C—e! I did not think you would have succeeded so well with the poor devil. I hope he'll soon be able to jog away from here; for, though he may move and talk again—and I dare say he will—I shall always look upon him as a dead man, notwithstanding. Suppose, now, that it should not be his own soul that has come back into him, wife, but some bad spirit, that all your working and water—I am sure it was not holy water—has brought back into his poor miserable corpse!"

"Jesu Maria! do not put such thoughts into my head, Giovanozzo," exclaimed the old lady with a look of horror; "but that cannot be either, for I made Giulio put some salt into the water, and the devil can never stand that; so go along with you. You cannot frighten me. Go and try to get back your senses, for you seem to have lost them, good man."

The contadino was glad to get away unques-

tioned; and, unlocking the door, he issued forth from his house. At first he did not turn his steps toward the villa, but took a path which led down to the river. At the distance of some hundred or hundred and fifty yards, however, where the trees screened him from his own dwelling, he looked round to see that none of his family followed, and then turned directly up the little rise. When near the terrace, he saw a man coming down the steps toward him, and suddenly paused; but a moment's observation showed him that he need have no alarm. The person who approached was no other than Antonio, between whom and the good peasant, a considerable intimacy had sprung up since Lorenzo Visconti had been at the Villa Rovera. Would you taste the best wine on an estate, or eat the sweetest fig of the season, make friends with the contadino and his family; and, perhaps acting on this maxim, Antonio had often been down to pass an hour or two with Giovanozzo, and enliven the whole household with his jests.

"The very man," said the contadino to him-

self; "he'll tell me just what I ought to do. He has travelled, and seen all manners of things. He is just the person. Signor Antonio, good morning to your excellency! What is in the wind to day?"

"Nothing but a strong scent of dead carrion that I can smell," answered Antonio.

"Well," said the contadino, with a grin, "I do not wonder; for there's carrion down at our house, and the worst carrion a man can think of, for it is not only dead carrion, but live carrion, too."

"Alive with maggots. I take you," answered Antonio; "that is a shallow conceit, Giovanozzo. It hardly needs an ell yard to plumb that."

"Nay, nay, you are not at the bottom of it yet," replied the peasant; "it is alive and dead, and yet no maggots in it."

"Then the maggots are in thy brain," answered Antonio. "But speak plainly man, speak plainly. If you keep hammering my head with enigmas, I shall have no brains left to understand your real meaning"

"Well, then, signor," said the contadino, gravely, "I want advice."

"And, like a wise man, come to me," replied his companion; "mine is the very shop to find it; I have plenty always on hand for my customers, never using any of it myself, and receiving it fresh daily from those who have it to spare. What sort of advice will you have, Giovanozzo? the advice interested or disinterested—the advice fraternal or paternal—the advice minatory, or monitory, or consolatory—the advice cynical or philosophical?"

"Nay, but this is a serious matter, signor," answered the contadino.

"Then you shall have serious advice," answered Antonio. "Proceed. Lay the case before me in such figures as may best suit its condition, and I will try and fit my advice thereunto as tight as a jerkin made by a tailor who loves cabbage more than may consist with the ease of his customers."

"Well, let us sit down on this bank," said Gio-

vanozzo, "for it is a matter which requires much consideration and—"

"Like a hen's egg requires to be sat upon," interrupted Antonio. "Well, in this also I will gratify you, signor. Now to your tale."

"Why, you must know," proceeded the contadino, "that this morning, an hour or two ago, just when I was coming up from the well, I saw Judita and Margarita, with Giulio, carrying something heavy into the house. It took all their strength, I can tell you, though the man was not a big man, after all."

"A man!" exclaimed Antonio; "was it a man they were carrying?"

"Nothing short of a man," replied Giovanozzo.

"And yet a short man too," said Antonio. "Was he a dead man?"

"Yes and no," replied the peasant; "he was dead then, but he is alive now. But just listen signor. It seems that a whole troop of these Frenchmen came down this way at an early hour, on their way to Pavia, and that they halted at the gates; but before they halted, they saw a

man on horseback, standing at the little turn-down to Signor Manini's podere; and that, as soon as he saw them, he tried to spur away, but their spurs were sharper than his; so they caught him and brought him back. Then, some hours after, up comes another party, and they held a sort of council over him, and confronted him with two or three other prisoners, and then strung him up to the branch of the great mulberry-tree. But presently some one came out of the villa and ordered him to be cut down, and as soon as that was done they all rode away, leaving him there lying on the road. That is what Giulio told me, for he was looking over the wall all the time."

"Dangerous peeping, Signor Giovanozzo," said Antonio solemnly; "but what did the lad do then?"

"Why, he would have let him lie quiet enough, if he had had his own way," replied the contadino, "for Giulio is a discreet youth. He takes after me in the main, and knows when to let well enough alone, when his mother and his

sisters are not at his heels; but the good *madre* you know—" and here he added a significant grimace, which finished the sentence. "However," he continued, "Margarita, who is tiring-woman to the young contessa, came running out of the villa, and told Giulio that it was Bianca Maria's orders to see if there was any life in the man, and try to save him. So they looked at him together, and fancied they saw his face twitch, and then they called Judita and carried him down into the house."

"And then?" asked Antonio.

"Why, then they sluiced him with cold water, and poured Heaven knows what all down his throat, or into his mouth, at least."

"And then?" said Antonio again.

"Why, then he began to wake up," replied the contadino, "and now he is snoring on a table down below, and I dare say he will be all the better for his hanging."

"He might have been so, if Giulio had not been too near," answered Antonio, drily, and then fell into a fit of thought.

"I am sure the devil has something to do with it," said Giovanozzo, in an inquiring tone.

"Beyond doubt," replied Antonio, solemnly, "but whether in the hanging or the resuscitation, who shall say? However, I will go down and see the gentleman. Do you know who he is?"

"One of Signor Buondoni's men, I fancy," replied the peasant. "We hear the signor was killed last night on the terrace, and I was thinking to come up and see the corpse. He must lay out handsomely, for he was a fine-looking man. I saw him by the moonlight just when he came to the gates yester-evening. I hope you do not think our people will be blamed by the old count for whatever we have done."

"Oh, no," replied Antonio, "you have done right well; though, if you had killed the one and not saved the other, you might have done better. Now let us go down to your house."

They walked some hundred yards in silence, and then Antonio said abruptly, "I wonder what is the good man's name. One of my old play-

fellows was in Buondoni's service I hear. What like is he, Giovan'?"

"Why, he is little and thin," answered the contadino, "with a big beard like a German's, and a sharp face. His muzzle is much like a hedgehog's, only he is as yellow as a lemon."

"That has to do with the hanging," answered Antonio. "I have seen many a man hanged when I was in France. The late king, who was no way tender, did a good deal in that way, and most of those he strung up were very yellow when they were cut down. I should have thought it would have turned them blue, but it was not so. However, I think I know this gentleman, and if so, must have a talk with him before he goes forth into the wicked world again. I would fain warn him, as a friend, against bad courses, which, though (as he must have found) they often lead to elevated places, are sure to end in a fall, and sometimes in a broken neck. But here we are before your house, Giovanozzo, and there goes Giulio, seeking you, I expect. Let him go, man—let him go. I wish you would

send Margarita one way after him and Judita the other, and then get up a little quarrel with your amiable wife, for I must positively speak with this gentleman alone, and may bestow some time upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

By the side of a small bed, in a small room next to the larger one of which I have already spoken in noticing the usual arrangements of a contadino's house, sat our friend Antonio, nearly an hour after his meeting with Giovanozzo. The same man who, some time before, had lain upon the table in the adjoining chamber now occupied the bed; but he was apparently sound asleep. The contadino's Xantippe had informed her husband, or rather Antonio, for whom she entertained much higher veneration, that the "poor soul," as she called Buondoni's retainer, had awoke and spoken quite cheerfully, but that he had now fallen into a more refreshing kind of

slumber; and, anxious to busy herself about her household affairs, she had willingly left her patient to Antonio's care, upon being assured that they were old companions.

Antonio, as the reader may have remarked, had that curious habit, common to both sages and simpletons, of occasionally giving vent to his thoughts in words, even when there was no one to listen to them—not in low tones, indeed, but in low-muttered murmurs—not in regular and unbroken soliloquy, but in fragments of sentences, with lapses of silent meditation between.

"It is Mardocchi," he said; "it is Mardocchi beyond all doubt. Mightily changed, indeed, he is—but that scar cutting through the eyebrow. I remember giving him the wound that made it with the palla."

He fell into silence again for a few minutes, and then he murmured, "We used to say he would be hanged. So he has fulfilled his destiny, and got off better than most men in similar circumstances." Here came another break, during which the stream of thought ran on still; and

then he said, "Now let any one tell me whether it was better for this man to be brought to life again or not. His troubles in this life were all over; he had taken the last hard gasp; the agony, and the expectation, and the fear were all done and over, and now they have all to come over again, probably in the very same way too, for he is certain to get into more mischief, and deserve more hanging, and take a better hold of Purgatory, even if he do not go farther still. He never had but one good quality; he would keep his word with you for good or ill against the devil himself. He had a mighty stubborn will, and once he had said a thing he would do it."

Here came another lapse, which lasted about five minutes, and then Antonio murmured quite indistinctly, "I wonder if he be really asleep! He could feign any thing beautifully, and his eyes seemed to give a sort of wink just now. We will soon see." Some minutes of silence then succeeded, and at length Antonio spoke aloud: "No," he said, as if coming to some fixed and firm conclusion, "no; it would be better for him

himself to die. The good woman did him a bad service. These Frenchmen will hang him again whenever they catch him, and if there be any inquiry into the death of Buondoni, they will put him on the rack; besides, we may all get ourselves into trouble by conniving at his escape from justice. Better finish it at once while he is asleep, and before he half knows he has been brought to life again."

He then unsheathed his dagger, which was both long and broad, tried the point upon his finger, and gazed at his companion. Still there was no sign of consciousness. The next moment, however, Antonio rose, deliberately pushed back his sleeve from his wrist, as if to prevent it from being soiled with blood, and then raised the dagger high over the slumbering man.

The instant he did so, Mardocchi started up, and clasped his wrist, exclaiming, "Antonio Biondi, what would you do? kill your unhappy friend?"

Antonio burst into a loud laugh, saying, "Only a new way of waking a sleeping man,

Mardocchi. The truth is, I have no time to wait till your shamming is over in the regular course. We have matters of life and death to talk of; and you must cast away all trick and deceit, and act straightforwardly with me, that we may act quickly; your own life and safety depend upon it. Now tell me, what did the Lord of Vitry hang you for?"

"His morning's sport, I fancy," answered the man; "but softly, good friend; you forget I hardly know as yet whether I am of this world or another. My senses are still all confused, and you, Antonio—my old playmate—should have some compassion on me."

"So I have, Mardocchi," answered Antonio; "and, as these good people have brought you back to life, I wish to save you from being sent out of it again more quickly than you fancy."

"Where is the danger?" asked Mardocchi, hesitating.

"That is just what I want to discover," said the other; "not vaguely, not generally, but particularly, in every point. General dangers I can

see plenty, but I must know all the particular ones, in order to place you in safety. Do you know that your lord, Buondoni, is dead?"

"Ay, so the good woman told me," replied the other; "killed by that young cub of the Viscontis. Curses on him!"

Antonio marked both the imprecation and the expression of countenance with which it was uttered; but he did not follow the scent at once. "Do you know at whose prayer you were cut down?" he asked.

"They tell me at the instance of the Signorina de Rovera," replied Mardocchi; "a young thing I think she is. I saw her once, I believe, with the Princess of Ferrara. If I live, I will find some way to repay her."

"Well, that is just the question," replied Antonio, "if you are to live or die? Hark you, Mardocchi! you must tell me all, if you would have me save you."

"But can you, will you save me?" inquired the man; "and yet why should I fear? The Frenchmen cut me down themselves, I am told."

"Ay, but they are very likely to hang you up again, if they find you out of sight of the pretty lady who interceded for you. Nay, more, Mardocchi: all men believe that you were deep in the secrets of Buondoni and of the Count Regent through him. Now, as you know, the King of France is very likely to put you to the rack if he finds you, to make you tell those secrets; and your good friend Ludovic the Moor, is very likely to strangle you, to make sure that you keep them."

Mardocchi made no reply, for he knew there was much truth in Antonio's words; but, after a moment's pause, the other proceeded, "You must get out of Lombardy as fast as possible, my good friend."

"But where can I go? what can I do?" asked the unhappy man. "I have lost my only friend and patron. I am known all through this part of the country. I almost wish the women had let me alone."

"It might have been better," said Antonio in a meditative tone. "'Once for all' is a good

proverb, Mardocchi. However, I think I could help you if I liked; I think I could get you out of Lombardy, and into the Romagna, and find you a good master, who wants just such a fellow as yourself."

"Then do it! do it!" cried Mardocchi, eagerly; "do it for old companionship; do it, because, for that old companionship, I have forgiven more to you than I ever forgave to any other man. Why should you not do it?"

"There is but one reason," answered Antonio, gravely, "and that lies in your own words. When you spoke of Lorenzo Visconti just now, you called down curses upon him. Now he is my lord and my friend. I was placed near him by Lorenzo the Magnificent, and promised I would always help and protect him. Do you think I should be doing either if I aided to save a man who would murder him the first opportunity? I always keep my word, Mardocchi."

"And so do I," answered Mardocchi, gloomily. "Sacchi and the rest told all they knew to the Frenchman, out of fear for their pitiful lives, and

they saved themselves. I refused to tell any thing, because I had promised not, and they strung me up to the branch of a tree. But I will promise you, Antonio, I will never raise my hand against the young man. I shall hate him ever, but—”

“Let me think,” said Antonio; and, after meditating for a moment, he added, “there are ways of destroying him without raising your hand against him: there is poison—there is the cord. Listen to my resolution, Mardocchi, and you know I will keep it: If you will promise me not to take his life in any way—for I know you right well—I will help you, for old companionship, to escape, and to join a noble lord in the Romagna; but, if you do not promise, I will make sure of you by other means. I have but to speak a word, and you are on the branch of the mulberry-tree again—”

“Stop, stop!” said Mardocchi; “do not threaten me. I am weak—sick—hardly yet alive, but I do not like threats. The crushed adder bites. Let me think: I hate him,” he continued, slowly,

recovering gradually from the excitement under which he had first spoken. "I shall always hate him, but that is no reason I should kill him. I have never promised to kill him—never even threatened to kill him. If I had, I would do it or die; but I do not like death. I have tasted it, and no man likes to eat of that dish twice. It is very bitter; and I promise you in your own words, Antonio. But you likewise must remember your promise to me."

"Did you ever know me fail?" said the other. "The first thing is to get you well, the next to shave off that long beard and those wild looks, and then, with a friar's gown and the cord of St. Francis, I will warrant I get you in the train of one of these French lords. Can you enact a friar, think you, Mardocchi?"

"Oh, yes," said Mardocchi, with a bitter grin, "I can drink and carouse all night, tell a coarse tale with a twinkling eye, laugh loud at a small jest, and do foul services for a small reward, if it be to save my life; but then I cannot speak these people's language, Antonio."

"All the better—all the better," answered Antonio; "many of them know a little Italian, and hard questions put in a foreign tongue, are easily parried. It would be a good thing for one half of the world if it did not understand what the other half said."

"But who is this good lord to whom you are going to send me?" asked the man. "Is he a courtier or a soldier?"

"A little of both," answered Antonio, "but more a man of counsel than either. His name is Ramiro d'Orco."

"Ah! I have heard of him," said Mardocchi. "He puzzles the people about the court. All men think that at heart he has vast ambition, and yet none can tell you why he thinks so. All agree in that, though some think he is a philosopher, some a simpleton."

"Well, well," answered Antonio, "the first thing is for you to recover health and strength, the next to get you safely away, the third to make you known to the Signor Ramiro. He is the sort of man to suit your views. I know him

well. He is rich, and, as you say, ambitious. He is wise, too, in a certain way; and though he has not yet found a path to the objects he aims at, he will find one in time, or make one, even were he to hew it through his own flesh and blood. He wants serviceable men about him, and that is the reason I send you to him. If he rises, he will pull you up; if he falls, there is no need he should pull you down with him. But we will converse more to-morrow; to-day you have talked enough, perhaps too much."

"But, Antonio, Antonio," said the other, eagerly catching his sleeve, "you will tell no one that I am here."

"No one on earth," answered Antonio; and, bidding him farewell, he left him.

The journey of Antonio back to the villa was somewhat longer than it needed to have been. He took devious and circuitous paths, and even turned back for a part of the way more than once. It was not, however, that he fancied himself watched, or that he feared that any one

might discover where he had been; but his brain was very busy, and he did not wish his thoughts interrupted till they had reached certain conclusions from which they were distant when he set out. He asked himself if he could really trust to Mardocchi's word, knowing but too well how predominant the desire of revenge is in every Italian heart. He half accused himself of folly in having promised him so much; and though he was, in truth, a good and sincere man, yet the common habits and feelings of his country every now and then suggested that it would be easy to put an end to all doubt and suspicion, if he saw cause, by the use of the Italian panacea, the stiletto. "But yet," he said to himself, "it may be better to take my chance of his good faith, and let him live. I never knew him break his word, and by his means, perhaps, I may penetrate some of Signor Ramiro's purposes in regard to young Lorenzo. I will tie him down to some promise on that point too. He will need my help yet in

many ways; and though I will not set a man to betray his master, yet I may well require him to warn his friends."

It was an age and a country in which men dealt peculiarly in subtleties, so much so, indeed, that right and truth were often refined away to nothing, especially in the higher and better educated classes of society. The bravo, indeed, was often a more straightforward and truthful man than the nobleman who employed him. He would own frankly that he was committing a great sin; but then he had faith in the Virgin, and she would obtain remission for him. His employer would find a thousand reasons to justify the deed, and would so pile up motives and necessities in self-defence that it would seem almost doubtful which was most to be pitied, himself or his victim. Antonio was by no means without this spirit of casuistry; and though no man could cut through a long chain of pretences with more trenchant wit than he could, in the case of another, yet he might not unfrequently employ them in his own. He resolved, therefore, not to

engage Mardocchi to betray his master's secrets, but only to reveal them when it was necessary that he, Antonio, should know them. The difference, indeed, was very slight, but it was sufficient to satisfy him.

Antonio's mind then naturally reverted to Ramiro d'Orco, and he asked himself again and again what could be the motive which led a man so famous for stoical hardness to show such tenderness and consideration for Lorenzo Visconti. "It may be," he thought, "that this grim old tyrant thinks it a splendid match for his daughter. But then they say she has a magnificent fortune of her own—her dower that of a princess. There must be some other end in view. She is a glorious creature too, midway between Juno and Sappho. Well, we must wait and watch. Heaven knows how it will all turn out. Perhaps, after all, Ramiro has some scheme against one of the princes of Romagna, in which he hopes to engage the King of France through young Lorenzo's influence.—It is so, I think—it is so, surely. He wants serviceable men too,

and asked me if I knew of any. Well, I think I have fitted him with one at least, and he will owe me something for the good turn. But I must hie homeward, and keep these things to myself. No more interfering between Lorenzo and his young love. He bore my warnings badly this morning: I must let things take their course, and try to guide without opposing.

CHAPTER XIII.

MILAN had its attractions even for the gay court of France. It was a devout and dissolute city; and we know how jovially, in some countries and at some times, dissoluteness and devotion have contrived to jog on together. Pastime and penitence, pleasure and penance, alternated among the courtiers of Charles VIII. with very agreeable variety; and it has been whispered that the young king himself was not unwilling either to finger forbidden fruit or to express contrition afterward. At all events, he wasted many precious days in the Lombard capital. Morning after morning, fresh detachments of his army were sent forward to Pavia, till that city might

be considered in possession of his troops; but still the young king lingered, and it was not till nine days after the events we have recorded in the last two or three chapters that the main host of France took its way southward.

How passed the intermediate time with those we have left in the Villa de Rovera? It was very sweetly. We must not dwell upon it, because it was so sweet; but a few words will tell all. Lorenzo almost longed to remain an invalid, that there might be a fair excuse for Leonora's tending; and Leonora feared to see him recover health and strength too soon, lest the order to depart should hurry him away.

Strange tales are told of the effects of Italian poisons in those days, and doubtless much exaggeration mingles with all the accounts we have received, but certain it is that, though the youth recovered steadily, each day gaining a little, yet his convalescence was slow, and the subtle bane of Buondoni's sword was more or less felt for many after days. Still no order to march arrived, but every day, about noon, the good Lord

de Vitry rode over, well attended, from Pavia to inquire after the health of his young friend; and although it is certain that Leonora could have given him more minute accounts of Lorenzo's state, and the old Count de Rovera could have furnished him with juster and more scientific views of Lorenzo's progress towards recovery, it was always Bianca Maria he first asked for. He speedily became a great favorite with the old count, nevertheless. There was something in his frank, soldier-like bearing that pleased, and something in his ever merry conversation that amused the old man, so that he began to wish the day far distant when the noble Lord of Vitry would come no more.

Bianca Maria was very happy too, and she gave the rein to happiness without fear. Neither she nor De Vitry ever dreamed that he was making love. She thought herself too young to be the object of passion, and he thought so too. He fancied he should like to have a daughter just like herself, without the slightest change in thought or look—he would not have had a word

she said altered—he would not have parted with one ringlet from her head; and she pictured to herself how pleasant it would have been to have an elder brother just like De Vitry.

At the house of the contadino all went on favorably likewise. Antonio visited the place every day, till at length, one morning early, he walked forth with a sandaled friar, who passed round the wall of the podere with him, and mounted a mule which was held by a little peasant-boy. Some ten minutes after, a troop of twenty French lances rode slowly on towards Pavia, and the friar, by Antonio's intercession, was permitted to join himself to the band. The contadino and the contadino's wife were for once satisfied with the same thing.

At length, however, the eventful day arrived when the King of France commenced his march from Milan against Naples. Drum, and trumpet, and pennon, and banderol, and long lines of glittering lances, and gorgeous surcoats, and splendid suits of armour, passed along the road within sight of the Villa Rovera, and though no absolute

order had arrived commanding Lorenzo to join his troop and assume the command which had been bestowed upon him, yet, as he gazed upon the passing host from the higher windows, he felt that duty required him to linger no longer, and that the next day, at the latest, he was bound to tear himself away from those who, in the short space of a few weeks, had become so dear to him. He felt sad; and yet there was something to a young and eager mind like his, in the inspiring sight of military array, which had its consolatory influence. He thought of acquiring glory and renown for Leonora's sake, and returning to her with bright fame and a glorious name, with a proud consciousness of courage and of skill in arms. "If we must part—" he said to himself.

If they were to part! That was the consideration most painful, for he had flattered himself every day with the hope that the promised letter of Ramiro d'Orco would arrive, giving him authority to escort his fair promised bride to join her father; and oh! how many enchanted

scenes had Fancy fabricated out of the vague shadows of that expected journey! No letter had arrived; the army was on its march; he could delay no longer; and the bitterness of disappointment was added to the bitterness of anticipate separation.

The last troopers of the main host of France disappeared; and Leonora gazed in Lorenzo's eyes, knowing, divining what was passing in his heart, as they stood, together, with Bianca Maria gazing from the neighbouring window.

"You must go, Lorenzo," said the beautiful girl, "you must go, I know it. Fear not to speak the words; Leonora would not keep you from the path of fame and honor if she could. It will be very terrible, but still you must go. I had hoped, indeed—"

"See! see!" cried Bianca Maria, "there are more horsemen coming. It is the king himself and his court; I remember well the array; and there is Count Ludovic, on the monarch's left."

Leonora and her lover turned to the window again, and saw the royal train sweep on towards

them. But suddenly the king drew in his rein just opposite the gates. He did not dismount; but a horseman dashed out from the escort, and rode into the court-yard of the villa.

"It is the order," said Lorenzo, in a low voice, "it is the order, and I must run down to receive it."

The two lovely girls followed him quickly; for theirs was an age when nature's impulses have not been curbed and disciplined, restrained and checked, either by the iron rules of a factitious state of society or the harder and more terrible shackles of experience. At the bottom of the great staircase he found the old Count of Rovera speaking with one of the king's officers, out of whose mouth he took the words of the monarch's message, saying, as soon as he saw Lorenzo, "His majesty, the King of France, my young cousin, desires your presence without. He has not time to dismount, this noble gentleman tells me. Otherwise he would have honored our poor house by his presence."

Lorenzo hurried away unbonnetted, and the

count, looking with a smile at his cousin and granddaughter, said gaily:

"Now would I wager this jewel against a fool's bauble that you girls would give your ears to hear the conference. If so take the rich peaches. Giovanozzo brought just now—one take them on the gold salver, and let the other carry out a cup of our best wine to refresh the monarch after his long ride."

But there is an innate modesty which requires no teaching of art, and Leonora answered:

"I pray you excuse me, sir; they are all men there without, and we should blush to obtrude ourselves upon the gaze of so many eyes."

As she spoke a warm glow came upon the face of Bianca Maria, but it was not her cousin's words that called it there. A shadow darkened the doorway, and the sound of a step well-known to the young girl's ear was heard, which brought the joyous blood from the heart to the cheek in a moment.

"I have stolen away," said De Vitry, "like a thief, and I have been a thief, too, sweet ladies, and my noble lord. Just before I set out from Pavia to meet the king, a courier came from Bologna; and, good faith, when I found out what he carried, I made free to rob him of his bags, not knowing who else might finger them. That letter for you, my lord count—that for you, Signora Leonora; and here is one also for Visconti, which I may as well trust to you also, very sure you will deliver it safely."

"And none for me?" asked Blanche Marie, with a faint smile.

"None—only a message," said De Vitry, while the others busied themselves with their letters they had received; and, as he spoke, he drew the fair young girl aside, adding, "I must deliver it quickly, for I must be back ere I am missed."

What he said to her in that low whisper, who shall tell? Her cheek turned pale, and then glowed crimson red, and her knees shook, and her lips quivered, so as to stop the words that

struggled for utterance, and yet there was joy in her eyes. It was as if he had given her the key of some treasury in her own heart which overwhelmed her with the first sight of the riches within.

"A soldier's love, a soldier's hand, a noble name, an honourable name—that is all I have to offer," were the words of De Vitry. "I know I am nearly old enough to be your father; but if you don't mind that, I don't."

He paused a moment as if for an answer, while Blanche Marie stood still trembling and silent; and, with a shade upon his broad, frank brow, he was turning away, when she murmured:

"Stay! stay!" and, drawing the glove from her hand, she put it into his.

"I will carry it into the cannon's mouth," he said, hiding it in his scarf; and then he kissed her hand, and returned to the old count and her fair cousin. "Lady, I must go," he said, taking Leonora's gloved hand, and bending over it. "My lord, the count, farewell. We shall all meet

again soon, I hope; and, in the meantime, you shall hear no evil of De Vitry, unless some of those foul cannon shot carry off his head. Adieu! adieu!"

In the meantime, Lorenzo had hurried forth, and stood by the side of the king's horse. Charles gazed kindly at him, and enquired after his health, while Ludovic the Moor bent his eyes upon him, but without suffering the slightest shade of enmity to cross his face.

"How goes it with you, fair cousin?" asked the king; "think you that you are able to ride on with the army towards Naples in a day or two?"

"Quite able, sire," answered the young man; "to-morrow, if it should be your Majesty's pleasure."

"Pale—pale," said the monarch, who seemed to have been studying his countenance. "Is that with loss of blood, Lorenzo, or the venom of the sword?"

"I lost little blood, sire," answered the young man, "but the poison was very deadly, and re-

quired both skill and careful nursing to bring me through with life."

"Now curses upon the foul heart and foul mind," exclaimed the young king, "that first conceived so dastardly a wickedness as that of smearing a good honest sword-blade with a deadly drug."

The face of Ludovic the Moor turned somewhat white, and his lip curled.

"Your Majesty's curse," he said, "must go somewhat far back, and somewhat low down; for the art was invented long ago, and the man who invented it, if he is to be damned at all, is very well damned by this time."

"Well, then, my curse shall have greater extent, noble sir," replied the king, frowning; "I will add—and curses be upon every one who uses such dark treachery."

The Regent did not reply, but there were very angry feelings in his heart; and it is probable that nothing but the knowledge that the dominions over which he ruled, and which he intended should soon be his own in pure possession, were

absolutely at the mercy of the French king's soldiery, prevented him from seeking vengeance. Indeed, nothing but fear can account for a man so unscrupulous having endured the mortifications which Charles inflicted upon him during the French stay in Lombardy; but it must be remembered that not only were many of his towns and castles in possession of the French, and others without any preparation for resistance, but that his own person was every hour within reach of the French swords, and that, though not quite a prisoner in his own court, he might become so any moment, if he excited suspicion or gave offence to the young monarch. He endured in silence then, and treasured his vengeance for a future day.

An unpleasant pause succeeded; and then Charles, turning to Lorenzo, continued the conversation, saying "So you think yourself quite ready to ride. Well, then, join us to-morrow at Pavia, Lorenzo. Methinks no one, however high his station, will venture to assail you when near our own person. Yet, as it is evident, from what

has already happened, that some one in this land would fain remove you to a better, you shall have a guard with you, and must not walk the streets of Pavia unattended. Where is De Vitry? We will give orders for a part of your troop in his company to join you here to-night."

"He has gone into the villa for a moment, sire," replied Lorenzo, "for the purpose, I believe, of bidding adieu to the good old count, as I presume your majesty marches on speedily."

"Nay, he will have plenty of time hereafter," said Charles; "I shall not leave Pavia for some days. I have matters to inquire into; but, in the mean time, I will give orders for the men to join you to-night; and methinks a score of French lances will be sufficient to protect you from any number of Buondonis who may be inclined or hired to assassinate you."

There was an insulting tone of superiority in the young king's voice and manner, which could not have been very sweet to the Regent Ludovic, but he seemed still to pay no attention to the monarch's words, gazing forward on the road

without change of countenance, as if busy with his own thoughts.

"Ah! here comes De Vitry," said the young king. "Mount, mount, my lord marquis. Adieu, my fair cousin Lorenzo. I will give the orders;" and, thus saying, he rode on.

Lorenzo saw the train depart and pass away, receiving many a good-natured greeting from old friends in the king's suite as it filed off along the road. When he returned to the vestibule of the villa with a somewhat gloomy heart, he found the old Count of Rovera, with the two young girls, still there and apparently in earnest conversation; but Leonora exclaimed, as soon as she saw him, "When must you go, Lorenzo?"

"To-morrow," said the young man sadly.

"Oh, then you will have plenty of time," exclaimed Blanche Marie, addressing her beautiful cousin.

"To do what?" asked Lorenzo.

"To get ready to go with you," answered Leonora, "if you will be troubled with such a companion. Here is a letter for you from my father

which will probably explain all. I have had another from him, telling me to come on with you and join him at Bologna, if you have a sufficient train to render our journey secure; but he says there is little or no danger by the way."

The old Count of Rovera shook his head with a disapproving look, murmuring, "Mighty great danger on the way, I think. On my life, I believe Ramiro is mad; but I must admonish the youth strictly before he goes, and take care that she has plenty of women about her."

CHAPTER XIV.

"SEE, De Vitry, that a force of twenty lances be sent from Pavia to our young cousin ere night." said the king; "that will be enough for his protection, my lord Regent, I presume."

"More than enough, sire," replied Ludovic, somewhat sternly. "Himself alone, with a few of his own servants, could pass quite safely—except, indeed, in case of some sudden tumult."

"Which tumults are easily raised in this Italy of yours," replied the young monarch. "It is therefore better he should have a French pennon with him. Methinks, after our alliance offensive and defensive, no one will dare to attack that, my lord Regent."

Ludovic bit his lip, but then he smiled grimly,

saying, "Not unless he should chance to encounter the forces of our dear cousin Alphonso, King of Naples, coming to drive the poor Sforzas out of Milan, and give your majesty some trouble in the plains of Lombardy. They would not, methinks, show much reverence for a French pennon, nor even for the banner of France itself."

"Tis strange we have no news," said Charles, with a shadow on his brow; "our last intelligence dates the 14th of last month, and then the Neapolitan fleet were under full sail."

"It is possible that Prince Frederick, who commands his brother's fleet, may have defeated the Duke of Orleans and landed in Tuscany, sire," observed Ludovic; "in that case we shall hear nothing of the enemy till we see him. May it not be better for me to summon all my forces, and march with your majesty till we are assured the roads are open? I can gather twenty thousand men together, from different garrisons, in eight days, but I have only four thousand now in Pavia."

The king seemed to hesitate; but just then De Vitry, who was riding half a horse's length behind on the king's right, raised his voice saying, bluntly, "Better wait decision till we are in the city, my liege, and then I will tell your majesty why."

"Better wait till then, at all events," said the king, thoughtfully; "but what is your reason, De Vitry?"

"Simply this, my liege," said the good soldier; "in the grey of the morning there came in a courier from Bologna. He said he was bound by his orders to stay in Pavia till your majesty arrived or sent. But he had letters for you, sire, which he would show to no one; and some private letters for the camp, which I took from him. They gave no tidings, however, that I could learn."

"Did he give no intelligence himself?" asked Ludovic, eagerly.

"He was mightily cautious of committing himself, Sir Count," answered De Vitry, drily;

"a most discreet and silent messenger, I can assure you."

All parties fell into silence, and rode on for about half a mile at a slow pace, when the count Regent turned to the king, saying, "Here I will spur on, so please you, sire. I would fain see that all is rightly prepared to receive you royally. I have been obliged to trust that care to others hitherto; but I would fain confirm the assurances given me by my people, by my own eyesight."

Charles bowed his head with a somewhat doubtful look, and Ludovic instantly forced his horse forward with great speed. Some twenty horsemen drew out from the rest of the cavalcade and followed him, and Charles turned his head toward De Vitry with an inquiring look.

"Let him go, sire—let him go," said De Vitry in a low voice, spurring up to the king's side; "he can do no harm. I have cared for all that. I have so posted our men that he has no more power in Pavia than an Indian has. Lucky that you sent me on as your quarter-master some days

before; for I had time to fix on all the commanding spots; and as I passed the army this morning, I gave the leaders instructions, and furnished them with guides to their several quarters. But, what is more important still, if your majesty will bend your ear for a moment, I drew from this courier, upon promise that I would not deprive him of his largesse, but add something on my own part, that the good Duke of Orleans, with his little squadron, had contrived to drive back the whole Neapolitan fleet into Naples. Had he had galleys enough he would have taken half of them and, perhaps, Prince Frederick into the bargain. As it was, he could only take one galley and sink another. The news is certain, sire; so Signor Ludovic's cunning scheme of joining his men with yours must fail."

"Think you he meant mischief!" asked the young king, whose face had gradually been lighted up as his gallant officer spoke.

"He meant to have the power of doing mischief or not as he pleased," replied De Vitry; "with twenty thousand men, sire, while you

had certain enemies and uncertain friends before you, he might have proved a dangerous comrade on the march whenever he chose to turn traitor, which he will do, depend upon it, at the slightest reverse. A man who can shut up his own nephew and ward, with the poor lad's wife and child, in the castle of Pavia, and feed them all three upon slow poison till there is no strength left in any of them, cannot be well trusted, sire."

"Has he done that?" exclaimed the young king, with his cheek flushing and his eyes all in a blaze; "has he done that?"

"I have it from the very best authority," replied the other. "I cannot speak from my own knowledge; for they would not let me into the castle; but I have been told so by those who know; and if he were not afraid of letting you see what is going on in that dark old fortress, why should he not assign you the magnificent rooms, where so many Lombard kings and Roman emperors have sat, and put the gates in possession of your troops? The house he has had prepared for your majesty is fine enough; but it is but a

citizen's house, after all; and, depend upon it, there are things within the walls of the castle he would not have you see with your own eyes."

"He shall find himself mistaken," said the young king—"he shall find himself mistaken. I will see, and that at once. How many men have we with us now, De Vitry?"

"Some four hundred, I should guess, sire," replied the officer; "but there are a thousand more in the little guard-house square at the gates, ready to escort your Majesty to your dwelling."

"That is right! that is right!" said Charles, with a smile; "let us put our horses to a quicker pace, good friend. We will be upon the worthy Regent's heels before he expects us."

In three quarters of an hour, Charles and his escort had reached the gates of Pavia. There was bustle and some disarray among the Lombard soldiers on guard; for the monarch had appeared before he was expected; but they hurried forth from the guard-houses to salute him as he passed, and the French men-at-arms and soldiers

in the little square were up and arrayed in a minute. At the entrance of the street leading from the Milan gate into the heart of the city—a street which the reader may well remember, from its gloomy aspect, especially if he have entered Pavia on a rainy day—a gallant party of horsemen, dressed in the robes of peace, advanced to meet the King of France, and, after due salutation, told him they had been sent by the Regent to conduct him to his dwelling.”

“Good! We will follow you speedily,” said the monarch; “but there is one visit we have to pay first, which cannot be omitted. In kingly courtesy and in kindred kindness we are bound to set foot to the ground in Pavia, for the first time, at the dwelling of our young cousin, the Duke Giovan Galeazzo. Lead on to the castle, De Vitry, and let the whole train follow. We will then accompany these good gentlemen to the dwelling prepared for us by the Regent’s kindness.”

Some consternation was apparent among the retainers of the Count Ludovic; they spoke to-

gether in whispers; but the young king showed no inclination to wait for the conclusion of their deliberation, and rode on, guided by De Vitry, merely saying to the Lombard nobles, with a somewhat stern look, "Gentlemen, we hope for your escort to the castle."

They did not dare to disobey an invitation which was so like a command; and the whole cavalcade moved onward toward the citadel, with the exception of one small page, who slunk away at the first corner of a street they came to, and was no further seen. It was not long ere the frowning barbican, with its drawbridge and portcullis, appeared before the royal party; and Charles, turning to the retainers, said, with a somewhat bitter smile, "Will you request the warders to open the gates for the King of France, to visit his fair cousin the duke. We must not summon them ourselves, having so many armed men with us; for that might seem too peremptory."

There was a moment of doubt and hesitation, evidently, on the part of the envoys. The men-

at-arms nearest the king, who, with the quick wit of Frenchmen, seemed to comprehend the whole situation in a moment, grasped their lances more firmly; and the king's brow began to darken at finding his orders disobeyed. Upon that moment hung the fate of Pavia, and perhaps of Lombardy; but it ended by one of the Lombard nobles riding forward and speaking to the officer at the gates. Whether he heard or not the sound of horses' feet at a gallop, I cannot tell, but certain it is that while he seemed to parley with the soldiers, who were apparently unwilling to open the gates even at his command, Ludevic the Moor, with two or three attendants, dashed into the open space before the barbican, and rode quickly to the front. He had had notice of the young monarch's movements, and his part was decided in a moment.

"How now, sirrah!" he exclaimed, addressing the soldiers beneath the gateway in a loud and angry tone, "do you keep the King of France waiting before the gates like a lackey? Throw open the gates! Down with the drawbridge!

My lord king," he continued, with bated breath, "I regret exceedingly that these men should have detained you; but they are faithful fools, and take no orders but from me or my dear nephew. Had your Majesty hinted your intention, orders to admit you instantly would have been long since given. I proposed to introduce you to-morrow to the duke, with due ceremony; but you are always determined to take your servants by surprise."

Charles colored a little, and felt himself rebuked; but when the Regent sprang to the ground and would have held his stirrup, he would not permit him, taking the arm of De Vitry, and bowing his head courteously, but without reply. At the gates, De Vitry drew back, suffering the king and Ludovic to pass on; but they had hardly reached the second gates, when the archway of the barbican and the drawbridge were taken possession of by the French soldiers, who began gaily talking to the Italians, though the latter understood not a word they said. The Lombard nobles looked sullen and discontented;

but they sat still on their horses, little accustomed to the dashing impudence of the French, and not knowing well what demeanour to assume toward men who came as their friends and allies, but who so soon showed that they considered themselves their masters.

In the mean time, each followed only by a page, the King and the Count-Regent walked on through several dim passages and lofty, ill-lighted halls. Few attendants were observed about, and Ludovic took notice of none of them till he reached a large and apparently more modern saloon, where an old man, somewhat richly dressed, stood at a door on the other side. Him he beckoned up, saying, "Tell my dear nephew, Franconi, that I am bringing his majesty the King of France to visit him. This royal lord, considering the duke's ill health, dispenses with the first visit. Will your Majesty take a cup of wine after your long ride? It will just give the old seneschal time to announce your coming, lest such an unexpected honor should agitate the poor boy too much."

"I thank you, my lord, I am not thirsty," answered the King, drily, "and, for certain reasons given by my physicians, I drink but little wine."

A slight and somewhat mocking smile passed over the hard features of Ludovic, as if he suspected some fear in the mind of Charles, and gloried, rather than felt shame, in an evil reputation. Both remained silent; and in a few minutes the old man returned to usher them into the presence of the young duke.

Oh! what a sad sight it was when the seneschal, now joined by two inferior officers, threw open the door of a chamber at the end of the adjacent corridor, and displayed to the eyes of Charles, the faded form of Giovan Galeazzo, the young Duke of Milan, stretched upon a richly-ornamented bed, and covered with a dressing gown of cloth of gold. The corpse of Inez de Castro seemed only the more ghastly from the regal garments which decked her mouldering frame; and the splendour of the apartment, the decoration of the bed, and the glistening bed-

gown only gave additional wanness to the face of the unhappy Duke of Milan. Once pre-eminently handsome, and with features finely chiselled still, tall and perfectly formed, not yet twenty years of age, he lay there a living skeleton. His cheek was pale as ashes; his brow of marble whiteness; the thin but curling locks of jet black hair falling wildly round his forehead; his lips hardly tinted with red; and a preternatural light in his dark eyes, which gave more terrible effect to the deathly pallor of his countenance.

A sweet, a wonderfully sweet smile played round his mouth when he saw the young King of France; and he raised himself feebly on his elbow to greet him as he approached.

"Welcome, my most noble lord, the King," he said in a weak voice; "this is indeed most kind of your majesty to visit your poor cousin, whom duty would have called to your feet long ago, had not sore sickness kept him prisoner. But, alas! from this bed I cannot move—never shall again, I fear."

Charles seated himself by the unhappy young man's side, and kindly took his hand. They were first cousins; their age was nearly the same, and well might the young monarch's bosom thrill with compassion and sympathy for the unhappy Duke.

"I grieve," said the King, "to see you so very ill, fair cousin; but I trust you will be better soon, the heats of summer have probably exhausted you, and—"

Giovan Galeazzo shook his head almost impatiently, and turned a meaning look upon his uncle.

"Has this continued long?" asked the king.

"It began with my entrance into this accursed fortress," replied the youth, "now some two years ago. It has been slow, but very, very certain. Day by day, hour by hour, it has preyed upon me, till there is not a sound part left."

"He fancies that the air disagrees with him," said Ludovic the Moor, "but the physicians say it is not so; and we have had so many tumults

and insurrections in the land, that, for his own safety, it is needful he should make his residence in some strong place."

"For my safety!" murmured the unhappy duke; "for my destruction. Tumults, ay, tumults—would I could strike the instigator of them! 'Tis not alone the air, good uncle; 'tis the water also. 'Tis everything I eat and drink in this hateful place."

"The caprice of sickness, believe me, nephew," answered Ludovic, bending his heavy brows upon him. "You are too ill to have appetite."

"Ay, but I have thirst enough," replied the young man; "one must eat and drink you know, my lord the king. Would it were not so."

"It often happens, I have heard," said Charles addressing himself to the Regent, "that what a sick man fancies will cure him, is of a higher virtue than all medicines—what he believes destructive, will destroy him. He says, I think, he was quite well till he came here."

"Oh, how well!" exclaimed the dying prince;

"life was then a blessing indeed, and now a curse. Each breath of air, each pleasant sight or sound, went thrilling through my veins with the wild revelry of joy. The song birds and the flowers were full of calm delight, and a gallop over the breezy hill was like a madness of enjoyment. But now—now—now—how is it all changed now! Verily, as the wise man said, 'The song of the grasshopper is a burden.'"

"We must change all this," said Charles, greatly moved; "we must have you forth from Pavia to some purer air. My own physician shall see you."

The unfortunate young man shook his head, and again turned his eyes upon his uncle with a meaning look.

"It is vain, my lord the king," he said, "or rather it is too late. My sickness has obtained too great a mastery. The subtle enemy has got me completely in his toils—the sickness I mean; he has got me in every limb, in every vein; a little more and a little more each day—do you understand me, sire?—and he will never

loose his hold while I have a breath or a pulsation left. But I have a wife, you know, and a child—a fine boy—who is to be Duke of Milan. For them I crave your royal protection. Let them be as your wards—indeed, I will make them so. If—if,” he continued, hesitating, and turning a furtive glance towards his uncle; “if I could see your majesty alone, I would communicate my last wishes.”

“You shall—you shall see me,” said Charles, with a gush of feeling which brought the tears to his eyes. But those feelings were destined to be still more excited.

While he yet spoke there was a noise without, and a woman's voice was heard speaking in high and excited tones.

“I *will* pass,” she said, “who dares to oppose me? I will speak with the noble King of France; he is my cousin—he will be my protector.”

The moment after the door burst open, and a beautiful young girl—for she was no more—entered, and threw herself at Charles's feet. Her hair had fallen from its bandages, and flowed in

beautiful profusion over her neck and shoulders. Her dress, though rich, was torn, as if main force had been employed to detain her, and her eyes were full of the eagerness and fire of a late struggle. Ludovic the Moor turned pale, and two men, who appeared at the door by which she entered, made him a gesture of enquiry, as if asking him whether they should tear her from the king's feet. Ludovic answered not but by a frown; and in the meantime the princess poured forth her tale and her petitions in a voice that trembled with anxiety, and hope, and terror.

"Protect us, oh my lord the king," she cried, "protect us! Do not raise me; I cannot rise, I will not rise, till you have promised to protect us. Protect us from that man—from that base relative, false guardian, traitor, subject. Look upon my husband, my lord; see him lying there withered, feeble, powerless; and yet but two years ago—oh, how beautiful and strong, and active he was! What has done this? What can have done it but drugs mixed with his daily food? Who can have done it but he who seeks to open

for himself a way to the ducal seat of Milan? Why is he here confined, a captive in his own dukedom, in his own city, in his own house? Why is he not suffered to breathe the free air, to control his own actions, to name his own officers and servants? Tumults! who instigates the tumults! The people love their prince—have always loved him; cheers and applause went wherever he trod; he passed fearlessly among them as among his brethren, till his kind uncle there, in his tender care for his safety, first stirred up a tumult by one of his own edicts, and then shut his sovereign up in a prison in everything but name. Deliver us, my lord king, from this captivity! Have compassion upon my lord, have compassion upon me, have compassion upon our poor helpless child! If ever your noble heart has burned at a tale of long and unredressed wrong—if ever it has melted at a story of unmerited suffering—if ever your eyes have overflowed at the thought of cruelty shown to a woman and a child, as you are mighty, as you are noble, as you are a Christian,

deliver us from the heavy yoke we bear! As king, as Christian, as knight, deliver us!"

"I will—I will," answered Charles, raising her and seating her by him; "by every title you have given me, you have a right to demand my aid, and I am bound to give it. My good cousin the count, this must be seen to at once. I will tarry in Pavia for the purpose of enquiring into these matters, and seeing them rightly regulated before I go hence."

"As your majesty pleases," answered Ludovic, bowing his head with a look of humility. "You will find, upon full inquiry, that I have acted for my nephew's best interests. The lady, poor thing, is somewhat prejudiced, if not distraught; but all these matters can be made perfectly clear when you have time to listen."

The young duke gave him a look of disdain, and she answered, "Ay perfectly clear, count, if the king will but hear both parties."

"I will, dear lady, doubt it not," answered Charles tenderly. "Be comforted. No time shall be lost. My cousin here shall be removed to a

purier air; my own physician shall visit him. Be comforted."

A smile—the first smile of hope that had visited her lip for many a day—came upon the poor girl's face. "Thank you—oh, thank you, sire," she said.

Well had she stopped there! But she was very young, had no experience of the omnipotence of selfishness with man. Her fate had been a very sad one. She never sang to her child but with tears; and yet all had not taught her that oceans of blood would not bar man from an object of great desire.

"I cannot be comforted my lord," she answered, "notwithstanding all your generous promises—nay, notwithstanding even their fulfilment, while my poor father, against whom your mighty power is bent—I speak of Alphonso, King of Naples—is in such a case of peril."

Charles's brow darkened; the compassionate look passed away; but still the unhappy girl went on, crushing out in the bosom of the young king the spark of pity which her melancholy

situation had lighted. "My poor father my lord," she continued, "has done nothing to call down your indignation upon him. Let me entreat your mercy on him; let me beseech you to pause and consider ere you ruin a man—a king who has never injured you—nay, who is ready to submit to any terms you are pleased to dictate. Oh, my noble lord, hear me; let me plead not only for my husband and myself, and my child, but for my father and my brother also."

Ludovic the Moor, one of the most subtle readers of the human heart that the world has ever produced, heard her first reference to her father with delight; and his eyes were instantly turned towards the young king's face. He traced but too easily the change of feelings going on. He saw the first spark of irritation produced by the unwelcome topic: he saw her gradually fanning it into a flame by her efforts to change the settled and selfish purpose of the king. He saw the struggle between the sense of justice and a favorite scheme; he saw the anger which a consciousness of wrong, together with a resolution

to persevere in wrong invariably produces, growing up in Charles's bosom; and he let her go on without a word till he perceived that the effect was complete. Then suddenly interposing, he said, "May it please your Majesty, such exciting scenes are too much for the feeble health of my poor nephew; I must care for it, if this lady does not. You have heard all she has to say, and if you will mark the duke's countenance, you will perceive, from the change which has taken place, that further discussion now would be dangerous if not fatal. I will therefore beseech your majesty to give this matter further consideration at a future day, and to visit the poor dwelling I have prepared for you."

The king rose; and the poor duchess, perceiving too late the error she had committed, bent down her head upon her hands and wept. Charles took a kindly leave of the young duke, removing the further consideration of his case to that "more convenient season" which never comes, and merely saying to the poor helpless girl who had pleaded for her father as well as for

her husband, "Be comforted, madam. We will see to your protection and future fate."

She raised not her eyes, but shook her head sadly, and the king departed. We all know that when we are dissatisfied with ourselves we are dissatisfied with others; and the young King of France felt as if the duchess had injured him in seeking a justice that he would not grant.

He walked hastily onward, then, somewhat in advance of the Count Regent. Ludovic followed more slowly, with a slight smile upon his countenance; and the door closed upon the young Duke of Milan and his fate for ever.

Through the long corridor, into the great reception-room, and across it, sped the King of France, displeased with himself and every one. The door was held open by the seneschal till Ludovic had passed it; but the Moor lingered a moment upon the threshold, gave a quick glance around, and whispered in the ear of the seneschal, "Give him a double portion in his wine to-night. We must have no more conferences." Then following the monarch, with a thoughtful

look, he aided him to mount his horse, and took his place by his side. Rumours spread through the City of Pavia on the following day that Giovan Galeazzo was in a dying state, and Ludovic confirmed them to the King of France, saying, "I feared the excitement would be too much for his weakened frame."

That night, in the midst of a joyous banquet, the heavy bell of the great church was heard tolling slowly, announcing that another Duke of Milan had gone to his tomb.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL was bustle and the hurry of preparation in the Villa Rovera. Leonora's two young maids had as much trouble in packing up her wardrobe as a modern lady's maid in arranging her bridal wardrobe, though, be it said, if a lady's apparel in those days was richer, it was not quite so multitudinous as the wardrobe of a modern lady. But these two young maids were not destined to be her only attendants; for the old count, thinking, as he had expressed it, that the Signor Ramiro d'Orco must be mad to intrust the escort of his lovely daughter to so young a cavalier as

Lorenzo Visconti, had engaged a respectable and elderly lady, who had served for many years in his own household, to give dignity and gravity to the train of his young relation.

Many and particular were the instructions which he gave in private conclave to the ancient Signora Mariana; and faithfully did she promise to obey all his injunctions, and keep up the utmost decorum and propriety of demeanour by the way.

But alas! there is no faith to be put in old women, especially those of the grade and condition of life which was filled by Mariana. They are all at heart duennas, and, strange to say, generally, however hard and cold their exteriors, feel a sympathy with the tenderness and warmth of youth. The old lady smiled as she left the old man; and perhaps she judged rightly that thus to restrain the actions and keep close supervision on the conduct of a young lady and a young lord upon a long journey through a distracted country was a task so much above her powers that it would be better not to attempt it. "I

shall have enough to do to take care of my old bones upon a rough trotting horse during the day, and to rest them during the night, without minding other people's affairs," she said. "Besides, the Signor Lorenzo is a nice, honorable young man, and would do nothing that is wrong, I am sure; and the signora is quite discreet, and moreover, proud, which is better."

Leonora and Lorenzo were full of joy and anticipation. Perhaps never in history was a long journey over rough roads, through a wild country, with the prospect of but poor accommodation any where but in the large cities, contemplated with so much wild joy. Fancy was like a bird escaped from its cage, and it soared over the future on expanded wings—soared high and sang.

Every now and then, it is true, a feeling of she knew not what awe or dread came over Leonora's heart—a sensation as if of some danger—a fear of the very wideness of her range, of her perfect freedom from all control—a conscious-

ness that she was a woman and was weak, and very much in love. But it soon passed away when she thought of Lorenzo's high and chivalrous spirit; and then she gave herself up to hope and joy again.

Poor *Blanche Marie* was the only one to be pitied, and she was very sad. Even the thought that she was loved—that the timid dream of her youth's dawning twilight was already verified, could not console her. She was losing her loved companion, her bright cousin, and her lover all at once. For the loss of the two first, indeed, she had in some degree to blame herself; for, with girlish enthusiasm, she had resolved, from the moment she heard that *Lorenzo* was about to return to Italy, that he should fall in love with *Leonora*, and she rejoiced that all had gone according to her plans, but she would rather have had them remain at the *Villa Rovera*, and make love there beside her. Then, as to *De Vitry*, she would not have withheld him from the field of fame for the world; but she would rather

have had the lists where glory was to be gained, at the back of the garden than far away at the end of Italy. Sometimes she asked herself if she really loved him—if she were not too young to know what love was; but then the pain she felt at the thought of his leaving her for months, perhaps for years, convinced her little heart that there was something in it which had never been there before.

Thus waned the day of the king's halt at the villa gates, and the morning came, when Lorenzo and his train, now amounting to twenty lances and some forty inferior soldiers, were to depart. Besides these, however, were Leonora's servants, male and female, Lorenzo's personal attendants, horses and mules and panieris, and a baggage-wagon, with six silver-gray oxen to draw it. Moreover, with the baggage-wagon were six foot-soldiers, armed with hand-guns, then a new invention, for the manufacture of which, as I think I have mentioned before, Milan had become famous. It made altogether a grand cavalcade, occupying so much of the road while the party

waited for their young leader and the fair lady he was to escort, that the peasant carts could hardly get past on their way to supply the market of Pavia with all the luxuries which the King of France's arrival in the city had brought into demand.

Much and sage advice had to be given by the old Count of Rovera both to Lorenzo and Leonora; and long was their leave-taking with poor Blanche Marie; but, in some sort it was fortunate it was so; for, before all was over, the Seigneur de Vitry appeared among them, exclaiming, in his usually gay tone, though there was a certain degree of shadow on his brow, "To horse! to horse, Visconti! You are to have a longer march than you contemplated. It has been decided by the King that seven miles is too short a ride for a young cavalier like you; and you are to march straight by Pavia, and act as an advance party on the way to Naples."

"But where am I to halt?" asked the young cavalier; "remember, Seigneur de Vitry, that it

is long since I quitted this land, and I know not the distances."

"All that is arranged," answered De Vitry—"arranged upon the very best judgment and authority, that of a man who knows not the worthy Count Regent, but who knows the country well. At Belgiojoso, just seven miles beyond Pavia, you will find the route-card, as far as Bologna, with every day's march laid down, in the hands of the king's harbinger, old St. Pierre, who goes with you, with twenty lances more, to mark out the royal quarters. But, remember, you command the whole party, and the king relies upon your fidelity and discretion. From each station you will march forward at eight in the morning, unless contrary orders from the court reach you earlier. If you should obtain information of any hostile movements in the front, you will send back intelligence, unless you meet with an enemy, in which case you will fall back upon the van."

"Without fighting?" asked Lorenzo.

"Why, methinks," said De Vitry, with a gay .

glance at Leonora, "that, considering that you have some non-combatants of your party, the less you fight the better till they are safely bestowed in the rear. But you must use your own discretion in that matter. It would not do to see a French pennon retreat before a handful. But you must be careful."

"I will, depend upon it, on the signora's account," answered Lorenzo.

"'Tis a good guarantee," said De Vitry; "but does the king know she goes with you!—Well, well, do not color and look perplexed; I will arrange all that for you, only you must tell me what tale I am to relate to his majesty. Am I to say aught about hasty marriages and a Signora Visconti? or that the days of knight errantry have been fully revived by you and De Terrail, and that you are escorting a distressed demoiselle to a place of safety?"

Though Leonora blushed deeply, Bianca Maria laughed gaily. "Why, you might have heard all about it yesterday, my lord," she said, "had you waited till Leonora opened her letter from

her father, or till Lorenzo came back. It is by his command she goes—at his request my cousin escorts her. But you were in such a hurry to leave us, you would stay for nothing.”

“I staid till I had got all I wanted for the time,” replied the good soldier, “though I may want more by and by.”

It was now Marie's turn to blush; but Lorenzo came to her aid, saying, “I had hoped to ask the king's permission to-day at Pavia. I could not ask it yesterday, for his majesty was gone ere I received Signor Ramiro's letter.”

“Well, let it pass,” said De Vitry. “I give leave for the present, and the king will not call the lady back when you are forward on the march, I think.”

“But, Seigneur de Vitry,” said Leonora, “I fear truly we shall lose our way, for neither Lorenzo nor I know a step beyond Pavia, and all these soldiers are French, I imagine.”

“Have you not the renowned Antonio with you?” said De Vitry, gaily; “trust to him—trust to him; but never doubt him or ask if he

is sure of the road, or he will let you run into a broken bridge and a swollen river. But get you to horse as speedily as may be. Where is my lord the count?"

"I am going to take leave of him," said Leonora, "and will show you the way."

"One moment, my lord," said Lorenzo, leading his commander a little aside; "tell me, I beg, why I am not suffered to halt in Pavia. There must be something more than you have said."

"Why, I believe it is simply this," answered De Vitry, after a moment's thought; "the good Count Regent is making a new road to Milan. He has already prepared to remove all the big rocks in the way; and the king thinks, and I think too, that he might judge it expedient to sweep away even the pebbles. The name of Visconti is not pleasant to him, Lorenzo—there are many drug-gists' shops in Pavia: so ask no more questions, my good friend, but mount and away. God speed you on your march and in your love. Well for you that you took the dark-eyed cousin. If you

had chosen the other I would have cut your throat."

No need to pause longer on the parting; no need to follow them on that day's march, for it was without incident. It seemed very short too, to the young lovers, although the distance was greater than had been expected—all distances are. The seven miles from the villa to Pavia and the seven miles from Pavia to Belgiojoso stretched themselves into full sixteen miles, which is contrary to all rules of arithmetic, but still it is an invariable result. The day was charming. It was like youth: it might have been too warm but for certain clouds which shadowed the sky from time to time, and tempered the ardour of the sun. The heavy-armed horses suffered a little: but at length the pretty village—for it deserved not the name of town—which has since given a famous name to a beautiful, high-spirited, but unfortunate lady, appeared before them about four o'clock in the afternoon. Old St. Pierre, the King's harbinger, had been there for

some hours with his twenty lances; the quarters were all marked out, and everything prepared.

"As the king must occupy his own lodging first, my lord," he said, "I cannot give you the best inn; but there is a very pretty little place at the edge of the village, where they seem good people, and I reserved that for you. I did not expect, indeed, so many ladies," he continued, looking towards Leonora and her maids, "but I dare say they can all be accommodated. Come and see."

Lorenzo rode on, with the old gentleman, who was on foot, walking by the side of his horse and talking all the time. The little inn to which he led them is, I dare say, there still. It certainly was so some twenty years ago—much changed, doubtless, from what it was then, but still with somewhat of the antique about it. There were vines over both sides of the house, and the rooms to the back looked over the gardens, and small, richly cultivated fields that surrounded the place.

The leaves of the vines were turning somewhat yellow, and many a cluster had been already plucked from the bough; but Leonora pronounced it charming, and Lorenzo thought so too. Happy had they both been if Fate had never placed them in higher abodes. Oh, those pinnacles; they are dangerous resting-places.

Let us pass over an hour or two. The men had been dispersed to their quarters and the proper guard set; a light meal had been taken, and the country wine tasted; the maids had found lodging, and were amusing themselves in various ways, with which neither the writer nor the reader has aught to do; Signora Mariana, like a discreet dame, was dosing in an upper chamber, and Lorenzo and Leonora were seated together in the little saloon at the back of the house, with the foliage trailing over the window and its veranda, and a small but neat garden stretching out down a little slope. They were alone together; the dream was realised; and what if they gave way to young, passionate love

as far as honor and virtue permitted. His arm was round her; the first kiss had been given and repeated; the beautiful head rested on his bosom, and heart had been poured into heart in the words which only passion can dictate and youth supply. Ah! they were very beautiful and very happy! and the attitude into which they had cast themselves was such as painters might copy, but not the most graceful fancy could imagine. It was full of love, and confidence, and nature.

As they sat, they were somewhat startled for a moment by the sound of a lute played apparently in the garden; but it was not very near, and the tones were so rich and full, the skill of the player so exquisite, that instead of alarming the timidity of young love, they only added to "the loving languor which is not repose" which before possessed them.

After listening for a moment, and gazing forth through the open window, they resumed their previous attitude, and continued their conversation.

Leonora's beautiful head again lay on Lorenzo's bosom, with her look turned upward to his face, while he gazed down into her eyes—those wells of living light—with his head bowed over her, as if the next moment his lips would stoop for a kiss: and now and then a grave earnest look would come upon their faces, while the words came sometimes thick and fast, sometimes ceased altogether, in the intensity of happiness and feeling.

What made Lorenzo look suddenly up at the end of about a quarter of an hour, he himself could not tell; but the moment he turned his eyes to the window he started and laid his hand upon his sword. But then a voice of extraordinary melody exclaimed, "Do not move! for Heaven's sake, do not move! Alas! you have lost it; you can never assume that pose again; but, thank Heaven, I can remember it, with what I have already done."

The man who spoke was a remarkably handsome man of about forty-four or five years of age, with a countenance of wonderful sweetness.

He was dressed in a black velvet coat, with a small cap of the same material on his head, and a little feather in it. His seat was a large stone in the garden just before the window, and on his knee rested a curious-looking instrument, which seemed the model of a horse's head cut in silver and ivory. Upon it was stretched a small scrap of paper, on which he still went on, tracing something with a pencil.

"This, sir, is hardly right," said Lorenzo, advancing to a door leading direct into the garden, which, like the window, was wide open. "You intrude upon our privacy somewhat boldly;" but the next instant he exclaimed, in a voice of delight, as he gazed over their strange visitor's shoulder, "Good heaven! how beautiful! Leonora! Leonora! Come hither and see yourself depicted better than Venetian mirror ever reflected that loved face and form."

"And you too, Lorenzo! and you too!" exclaimed Leonora. "Oh! it is perfect!"

The artist looked up and smiled with one of those beaming smiles which seem to find their

way direct to the heart, as if an angel looked into it. "It is like you both," he said, "but it was the attitude I sought, and you started up before I had completed the sketch. Yet I can remember it. My mind, from long habit, is like a note-book, in which every beautiful thing I behold is written down as soon as seen. Look how I will add in a moment all that is wanting," and he proceeded with rapid pencil to add the arm of Lorenzo cast round Leonora's waist, and her arm resting on her lap, with her hand clasped in her lover's.

The colour came in the beautiful girl's cheek, but without remarking it the artist said:

"Was it not so?"

"Even so, I fear," murmured Leonora.

"You must let me have this drawing," said Lorenzo; "you can put no higher value on it than I will be right glad to pay. It will be to me a memorial of one of the happiest days of my life, and of her I love better than life."

"Nay, I would not part with it for any payment," said the other; "but, having done as

you said just now—intruded on your privacy—I will pay for the intrusion by sketching for each of you, the portrait of the other, and that without price. But let us come into the saloon, and call for lights; it is getting somewhat dark. Will you, young gentleman, take my lute, while I put up the sketch and my pencils.”

“Is this then a lute?” asked Lorenzo, taking the horse’s head in ivory and silver. “Oh! I see; here is a finger-board, and the strings are fastened to the lower jaw. I never saw a lute like this.”

“Probably not,” the other answered; “it is my own design and workmanship.”

“Then was it you whom we heard playing, just now?” asked Leonora. “The music was divine.”

“It might be so,” answered the artist gaily, “for Cupid was very near—though I knew not of the god’s neighbourhood—and it is the nature of all godlike beings to cast their influence far around them, and raise common things toward divinity. He is a mighty deity that Cupid,

and, when worshipped purely, has precious gifts for the sons of men. You two are very young," he continued, thoughtfully, "and doubtless noble."

"We are young," answered Lorenzo, "and noble as far as blood is concerned. Noble in a better sense I trust we are likewise. Here is one, at least, who is, and what may be wanting in myself my love for her shall give."

"'Tis one of the precious gifts I talked of," answered the artist, moving to the house, and entering the little saloon; "a high and pure love ennobles him who feels it; and well, young gentleman, have you distinguished between two nobilities. Yet, constituted as this world is—nay, not only as this world, but as man himself is—there must always be a factitious nobility, which in the eyes of the world, will rise above the other. The notion of anything like equality ever existing among men is a dream of human vanity, contrary to all experience, and to the manifest will of God. The only reason why

men ever entertained it is that the lower intellects feel their selfishness wounded at acknowledging they are inferior. Now, as the lower intellects predominate immensely in point of numbers, and all their vanities combine to pull down those superior to their own level, you will always find democratic republics attempted in those countries where there is no great predominance of intellect in any, or that predominance is confined to a very few. If there be one intellect vastly superior to any others, the constitution of the state will soon become a monarchy; if there be more than one or two greatly above the rest, you will have an aristocracy, and the natural order, as far as I have seen in the world, will be the monarch representing the highest intellect and most powerful will; an aristocracy representing those next in mental powers; and below them the plebeians, representing the great mass of stupidity and ignorance which exist in this world—the weak, the vicious, the thoughtless, the idle, the brutal, the bar-

barons. Granted that these several classes will not long justly represent the reality; but still the order is the natural order, and men strive against it in vain. We have seen these democratic republics tried over and over again in this our Italy, producing misery and disorder during their existence, and all tending to the same consummation."

"But how is equality among men contrary to the will of God!" asked Lorenzo; "the incarnate Son of God himself seems to have preached such a doctrine."

"I humbly think you are mistaken," answered the artist. "On the contrary he always inculcated submission to our superiors. But you ask how is it contrary to the manifest will of God? I reply, not only by the difference of mere worldly advantages which he has bestowed upon various men, for that might depend upon a false and mistaken scheme of society, but by the difference of mental and spiritual powers which he himself has ordained and bestowed, without any

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intervention of man or of man's will. Take one of the many idiots, or half idiots, who sit upon the steps of St. John at Rome, and place him by the side of the late Lorenzo de Medici. Take them as mere infants, and try to educate them alike—nay, give the highest culture to the idiot, the lowest to Lorenzo, what would be the result? The one would tower above the other with his gigantic mind, the other would remain an intellectual pigmy; the one would be a prince of thought, the other a plebeian. Here is an inequality decreed by God himself; and although I have taken an extreme case, you will find the same rule pervade all minds and all natures. No man has the same capabilities. Every gift is unequally apportioned; and the same Almighty Being who gives to one man wealth and to another poverty, to one man the stature of a hero, to another the height of a dwarf, has decreed that inequality of station against which the vanity of multitudes struggles in vain. I myself am a plebeian, you are nobles, yet I would not alter the order of

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society if I could. But let us change the topic; or, while this sweet half light still lingers in the west, I will play upon my favourite lute again, and let you hear some verses which flow somewhat with the current of our thoughts."

For a moment he leaned his cheek against the instrument, struck a few chords, put the strings in perfect tune, and then, with the skill of a great musician, drew forth harmonies such as were seldom heard in those days. A minute or two after, his voice, far sweeter than any sounds which could be brought from the lute, joined in, and he sang some irregular verses, which he seemed to improvise.

SONG.

"Let him who cannot what he will,
Will only what he can.
'Tis surely Folly's plan,
By willing more, to compass his own will.
Then wise the man who can himself restrain
To will within his power; he ne'er shall will in vain,

“ Yet many a joy and many woe,
From knowing or not knowing what to will,
In sweet and bitter drops distil,
For from ourselves our fate does mostly flow.
Fair skies to him who steers his bark aright,
And keeps the pole star—duty—ever in his sight.

“ He who takes all, is rarely blessed ;
The sweetest things turn soonest sour,
When we abuse our power.
Oft have I wept for joys too soon possessed.
What lessons, then, from these light verses flow?
That which we ought to do, and what we ought to know.”

END OF VOL. I.







